STAR INSIGHTS & ATTITUDES

BHAWANA SOMAAYA

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IT

Bhawana Somaaya is a respected name in journalism, and has over two decades of contribution in this field.

I wish her all the best for the success of her book.

Rs. 500.00

Best wishes.
Thomas Sowell.

21 March '02.

STAR INSIGHTS & ATTITUDES

BHAWANA SOMAAYA

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To

My mother for storing these
manuscripts in her attic for
two decades.

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I'm grateful to Simon D'Souza, who helped me put my 25 years of work into order. To the several publications I've contributed over the years.

FOREWORD

The idea for the book came when selecting excerpts for my second book, *Salaam Bollywood*. Re-reading the old quotes from pages stored inside a suitcase I was filled with a sense of nostalgia and also embarrassment. I no more identified with the issues raised. Would the stars I had interviewed years ago, also feel the same way, I wondered? And if not, is it fair to bind them just because their words lie frozen in an unperished 4x2 audio cassette?

Reflection propelled reassessment. I discovered that however alienated I felt from my early writings, the encounters were significant pointers to the events gone by. The tone of communication, the jargon used were indicative of the trends of that time. There is a familiar pattern in the choice of subjects. Some film personalities don't feature at all, despite being in the news. It's because interviews like relationships, call for a certain chemistry, a meeting ground. It tells about the influences working on the journalist at that time and also of the box-office farings of the stars when they made those statements.

The final responsibility of the spoken word at all times however rests with the star. The quotable quotes, even if temporarily forgotten, have a way of bouncing back into print, and always, when the star is going through a vulnerable phase. Rekha confessed that she did not anymore identify with her impulsive statements of the past. 'I cringe every time I read an old quote and want to deny it, but can't.' It's because words have a culture of their own, analysed writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar. Sharmila Tagore once said that she'd rather refrain from making statements, than regret them later. 'If I'm going to be accountable for every thing I say, I'd prefer not to be embarrassed.'

It has been my sincere attempt to retain an article exposing my prejudice towards my subject, just as I haven't deleted an article revealing my subject's persecution towards me or my tribe. Balancing a fair selection of the insights emerging from the two worlds, the showbiz and the media hasn't been easy. There's no escaping altered perceptions. It's the magic of time. Re-reading the old interviews, I admit I have been uncharitable towards Smita Patil in '77, who accepted my barrage of offensive questions on the chin. Taking liberties with Shashi Kapoor, invading into personal territory with Aruna Irani and being judgemental about Rishi Kapoor. On the other hand, I'm optimistic about Shekhar Kapur, then an ordinary struggler. And unrelenting with the newly-wed Shabana Azmi, even though a friend.

Today, as media graduates from manual typewriters and spacious tape recorders to floppy discs and match-box dictaphones, I discover that my own focus in my 25 years long journey has shifted from personality to cinema, my writing concentrating on the craft of acting. The early decade relied more on my observations, the latter, on my conversations with them. This was inevitable and perhaps not as easy without the fodder of the former years. Today, I've finally acquired confidence to question stars about what interests me, rather than what I perceive interests my readers.

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PREFACE

When I first met Bhawana at Ranjit Studios, Dadar, in 1977, she was dressed in a crisp saree, her long hair tied in a braid, not quite comfortable in her surroundings. When she spoke however, she seemed confident, but still the wrong person in the wrong place. Her ability to ask probing questions without being personal, struck me as a rare quality. I should have been defensive, but I felt protective towards her and it was the beginning of a lasting friendship.

Over the years, she's done a number of interviews with me and all were satisfactory. But while I was familiar with her writings on me, I wasn't of the others. This book is revelatory for it contains a profile on yesteryear actress Meena Kumari, a candid conversation with Neetu Singh and an in-depth interview with Zeenat Aman. And in all she manages to sustain quality and interest. It's because five out of her eight questions relate to the human being. She has the unique ability to present stars without adding her views to the copy or using the interviewee as her mouthpiece, a common practice by journalists. There are stars she knows intimately, some are fleeting contacts, yet all the encounters give a glimpse into the person beyond the persona. It's because she is able to win the trust of the people she interviews and is responsible enough to not let them down.

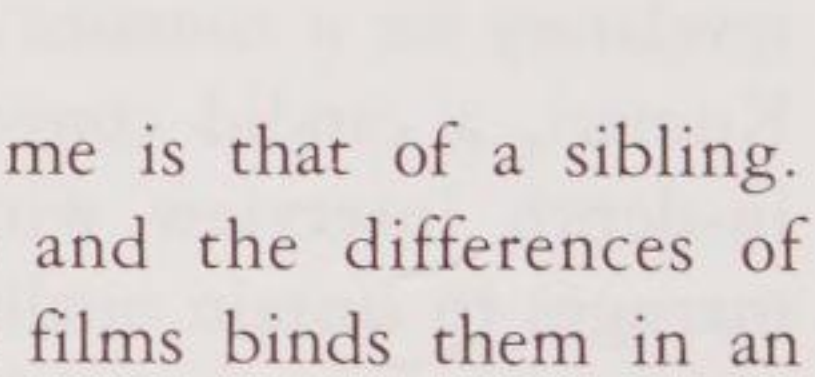
In my more than two-decade old association with her, a lot has changed and a lot remains the same. Her hair is still long and in braid ... she still wears crisp sarees but seems more at ease with her surroundings. She has a lot to complain even now and makes me laugh with her original

phrases and can surprise me with her odd choice of a modern photograph, when one is expecting her to choose the traditional *bindi*-saree attire... She shrugs off a live-in relationship nonchalantly, just when you expect her to be scandalised, but frowns upon the new breeds' irreverent behaviour. But most important, she still has a strong perseverance and will not rest until she accomplishes her goals.

My agreeing to write the Preface is because I respect her perceptions and identify with her observations of stars. In a strange way, this reassures my faith in our friendship. She's more of a romantic than a journalist and strongly believe that her foray into film journalism and her tireless pursuit, comes out of her undying passion for cinema. She comes alive when doing an appraisal of a film and can evaluate its artistic content with clinical efficiency, although she has never been a rigid reviewer.

Bhawana is perhaps the only journalist of her time who has a body of work that encompasses two decades of showbiz, now stepping into the third with equal ease. The book is unique for it chronicles the growth of several celebrities through the eyes of a journalist, a common exercise in Hollywood but not in our country. The book offers rare insights into actors and provides inspiration to budding journalists wanting to make a career in the same field.

The star-journalist relationship to me is that of a sibling. Despite the on-going bickerings and the differences of opinion, their common passion for films binds them in an extraordinary relationship. If both can accept this reality, one can have a lot of fun. My relationship with Bhawana perhaps, is an example of this understanding and acceptance....



(Rekha)

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The 70's were a volatile decade.

- ❀ Film-maker Hrishikesh Mukherjee, the original angry man, was the director media loved to hate, because of his close association with superstar Amitabh Bachchan, then inaccessible to the press. I did a nostalgic interview with him that left little chance for provocation.
- ❀ Smita Patil was Shyam Benegal's new discovery in *Nishant* after Shabana Azmi in *Ankur* and the media was curious about her. She gave unconventional interviews, which was one of the reasons why she was frequently featured by the glossies. Going through the predictable phase of being unable to decide whether to do commercial films or not, Smita often made contradictory statements which resulted in controversies.
- ❀ Shashi Kapoor was riding high after a prolonged low phase. His elder brother Raj Kapoor directing him during *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* called him a taxi because Shashi did three-shifts a day, distributing two hours to every producer. My assignment of a nine-day-diary with Kapoor was conducted during this frenzied phase.
- ❀ Aruna Irani was eternally in love and always with the wrong man. The emotional interview is an analysis of how and why the rot sets in a relationship.
- ❀ Rajesh Khanna had lost the crown to Amitabh Bachchan, but had to still come to terms with it. Looking back, I feel it was very brave of Khanna to agree to the week-long diary, for he knew that I could see the chinks in his armour.
- ❀ It was a trying phase for Shekhar Kapur. Having failed in his two attempts as an actor in *Jaan Haazir Hain* and *Toote Khilone*, he insisted he was meant for bigger success, only nobody believed him.
- ❀ Shashi Kapoor had turned producer with *Junoon* and was on the edge. Rishi Kapoor and Neetu Singh had confirmed their marriage plans after a long courtship. The wedding was the most talked about event of the decade. The 24 hours spent with Neetu, a month before the D-day is a first person account of her pre-bridal nerves.

1977

HRISHIKESH MUKHERJEE

He is a supporter of the latest 'no-interview' syndrome. And no, he hasn't imbibed it from Amitabh Bachchan. He has his own reasons. 'The press misinterprets even your offering a cup of tea to them as an act of ulterior motive, when it's a gesture of good breeding.' In his dhoti-kurta *and shawl, he looks more like a poet and less of a director. His favourite dog comes and sits besides his chair. The dog barks at you, but the director shoos him away, says 'three things I cannot do without are my spectacles, pen and paper.' His man in waiting brings all three for him. Hrishida breaks ice with a typical* 'Bolo...?' *I announce the subject of my interview: The inspiration behind his films. He agrees, says all his films are based on real life characters or incidents.*

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Musafir: When I started *Musafir*, I was living in a small flat near Mohan studios. Little things like the scribblings on the walls, *dhoti* labels stuck on the window panes (probably by a small child) fascinated me. One day, Dilip Kumar asked me why I hadn't thought of making my own film. 'Because,' I said, 'I want to do something different.' 'Let's hear your different?' Dilip Kumar taunted. That's when I told him about the room I lived in... 'The room has a history. The four walls have a story to tell. God knows how many people have used that room before me and how many more will come after me. Different characters. Different relationships. I told Dilip Kumar that I wanted to make a film about this room. He heard me in silence, then said, "Your different idea is interesting, but dangerous. If you're still confident, go ahead, I'll work free for you.' He did, and was also proved right. *Musafir* was a miserable flop. The critics loved it, but I was down in the dumps.

Anupama: It's the story of a cousin of mine. Her mother died soon after giving birth to her and for this her father hated the very sight of her. He would return home dead drunk at night and would shower affection on his daughter, but the next morning he would pour scorn on her. This went on for quite some years. My cousin had a permanent petrified look on her face. This worried me and I made up my mind that one day I'd make a film on her life. She was my *Anupama.* Most of the incidents in the film are true. The film brought me two awards: The President's award for

the second Best Hindi film of the year, and another State award.

Aashirwad: I took to the idea out of sheer defiance. Ashok Kumar used to always joke that I had made so many films with him as a character artiste, but none as a hero. One day I phoned and told him, 'If you don't stop teasing me, I might just end up making a hero out of a *buddha*.' He laughed it off thinking I was joking. I wasn't. The day I had the story of *Aashirwad* on hand, I told Dadamoni that the time had come for the *buddha* to play hero. That's how *Aashirwad* was born. *Aashirwad* won the National Award for the best film. Dadamoni received the best actor and the Bharat Ratna.

Anand: I wrote *Anand* in 1954 with Raj Kapoor in mind. The film is based on my friendship with Raj Kapoor. The sheer thought or rather the fear of what would happen to me if Raj Kapoor were to die, was what made me write the story. The film has many personal moments borrowed from our lives. Most of the events are based on real incidents. My only regret is that I took too long to make the film. By the time I got down to shooting it, Raj had become too old to play Anand, so I opted for Rajesh Khanna. *Anand* bagged the President's Award for the Best Hindi film.

Guddi: The film was a necessity at that time. Those were the days of the Rajesh Khanna wave! The superstar had literally swept the country and was driving a lot of students, particularly girls, crazy. We thought of what better way to tell the truth to our audience. We penned a script that would explode the myths around screen idols. I wanted the lay man to know what happens behind the scenes. How shootings take place and how film stars lead ordinary lives. What's seen on the screen is not reality. *Guddi* was the breaking of a fantasy. It's that chunk of reality that breaks dreams.

Bawarchi: I adore making films like *Bawarchi*. I have a weakness for simple uncomplicated subjects. My films usually revolve around ordinary people. It comes out of a beautiful thought of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya which said: *'It is so simple to be happy. But it is so difficult to be simple.'*

Abhimaan: Contrary to what people think, *Abhimaan* was

not made with Jaya and Amitabh in mind. Innumerable people, both inside and outside the film industry, keep asking me if I had made this film as a guideline or warning to their marriage. My answer is an emphatic 'NO'. When I first thought of the film I didn't even know Amitabh and Jaya. The story of *Abhimaan* was written sometime in 1955, inspired by the marriage of a family friend. About a couple who were professional singers. Their marriage was heading for the rocks. Yes, *Abhimaan* is their real story! But there's a difference. In the real story, ego did not play as important a part as it did in my film. I added the ego bit for drama. As it turned out, it could be the story of any couple pursuing the same profession.

Namak Haram: I made this film only to emphasize that impersonating somebody can be very dangerous. When a man starts playing a role, he gradually becomes featureless. After a while, he loses his identity and his individual traits wear off. He becomes a victim — a helpless victim — of the character he's enacting. The outcome is a terrible dilemma. It becomes difficult to distinguish the real man from the role. The film was a lesson to all actors and actresses. But I doubt if anybody took the hint and learnt the lesson!

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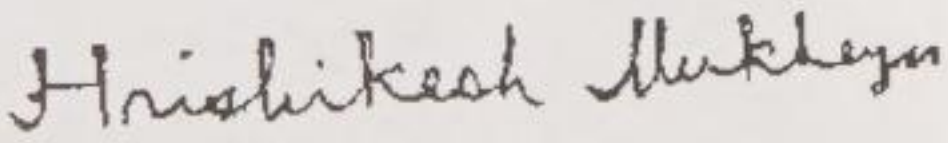
'Going down memory lane, I accept I've changed over the years. I'm nearing 74 and should be called only Hrishi now — the *Kesh* (hair) have fallen off !'



(Hrishikesh Mukherjee)

1977

SMITA PATIL

News has a way of happening with Smita Patil. For, even though her professional roots lie in the idiot box, there's nothing mundane about her. News is sometimes made, even without her trying, because of her outspoken views. When I enter the room, clothes and piles of books litter the room. A favourite pillow on the bed, a sentimental gift on the table. A poem and the day's programme stuck on the pin board. Paintings, photographs and nestling comfortably amidst it all, a tanpura *in a corner. The ceiling is intriguing. It has a small opening, a skylight, through which sunlight seeps in and floods the room with brightness. 'My room is turning into a studio,' she laughs. 'Visitors dislike the place, but we are addicted to it. We have the same lighting all over the house.'*

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Does it bother you that while some filmmakers find you extremely photogenic, there is another section who find you unfit for commercial cinema. Is it true that you described yourself as having a 'classic' face?

Wait... You said photogenic, didn't you? I agree with the former. I photograph well. I agree with the latter too. I am dark and ugly. There is a third category — my friends — who find me a beautiful person. I've never said that I have a classic face. I'm embarrassed by mild compliments. Satyajit Ray mentioned it to Shyam Benegal and he repeated it to me later. The only thing I've ever boasted of is my driving. I am an excellent driver. In fact, I'm a much better driver than an actress.

Insiders say that cricital acclaim has gone to your head. You've become conscious of your special image.

I don't know if I've become less attractive. But I do know that I'm less spontaneous now. It's like falling in love. The first time you fall in love, the experience is beautiful. The second and third time round, you become objective. You view yourself from your perspective, from your lover's perspective. Maybe I'm not what I was, but I haven't tried to change myself consciously. A few days ago, while cleaning my drawer, I spotted an old picture of *Nishant.* Well, I certainly looked pretty in it. Today, I look more grown-up. I don't know what I've lost. Probably the 'firsts' just cannot be replaced.

Did you really make the snide remarks about other actresses, calling them dumb and stupid? Apparently Sarika and Zarina Wahab are annoyed with you. So are many others.

I'm not stupid to call other people stupid. I'm quite dumb and silly myself. I'm supposed to have ignored Zarina Wahab at the airport. But I didn't. I have never seen any of Zarina's films. I've only seen her photographs. Besides, her small face was hidden behind huge glasses. Had she smiled, I would have definitely smiled back. I guess I'm shy to make the first move. What if she does not recognise me? Most of the time people don't. As for Sarika, I saw her at a function. But since we were not introduced, we didn't talk. All these things are instinctive — some people look approachable, some don't. There are some you can just tap and say, 'Hey, listen I like you.' For instance, I spotted Nutan buying cheese at Cafe Galleries on Warden Road and just walked up to her and complimented her on *Kasturi.*

You seem to have a hang-up about Shabana Azmi. Are you envious of her success?

Success is a relative term. I've attained mine easily. I didn't have to chase it. I don't have hang-ups about anybody. It's the journalists who suffer from the Shabana-Smita hang-up. Can I help it if every journalist I meet, only asks me about Shabana?

Shabana feels that you cannot give a single interview without mentioning her. According to her, you mention her even without context. In a recent article, while discussing skin tones, you said that while Shabana was dark complexioned in her early days, she's turned fairer now. Was this necessary?

Well, Shabana and I have a funny kind of relationship. We are friendly and unfriendly in spurts. On her birthday, even though I was miles away I sent her a book. And on my birthday, she was miles away but she sent me a telegram. I agree I mentioned her in an interview discussing complexion. But then she is one of the few actresses with a clear complexion. I guess I mentioned her because I often think of her.

What's gone wrong between you and Shashi Kapoor. He was gaga over you, but now he seems to have cooled off.

He was gaga, and he stopped. I've done nothing to annoy

him. Ours was always a laughing-joking relationship, that's all. For any kind of interest to develop, you need a lot of time and a common ground, work. Shashi Kapoor and I were not doing a film together. If we were, probably our association would have developed. Maybe he would have liked me as an actress, or maybe he would have looked at my dirty jeans and asked, 'Don't you ever have a bath?'

Old guards reveal that at the recent Tashkent festival, you flirted openly with Rishi Kapoor and Nasir Husain.

Teach me to flirt... I don't know how to. Probably my uninhibited behaviour seems like flirting, but I don't flirt consciously. I never went through the happy phase of adolescence. At home in Pune, freedom had a different meaning. Too much space, too much silence. When I came to Mumbai, I experienced a culture shock. At Elphinstone College I would sit and and stare at people. I dropped out for one year and joined St. Xavier's. Next, I joined films, and once again, I was exposed to a different world. I've said again and again that I'm scared of people. The Tashkent episode has been blown out of proportion. I met this journalist at President Hotel and she pounced on me with a charge sheet. Naturally, I was provoked. I should have kept quiet, but I fell into her trap. Words were put into my mouth. I didn't say I don't know Nasir Husain, but yes, I don't know the title of his latest film. Now, I know because I went to see the film and didn't get the tickets. Again, I never said I don't like Chintu.

What exactly is your relationship with Shyam Benegal?

Shyam is not promoting me or looking after my business. He doesn't even know which films I'm working in, besides his own. Nor do I keep track of his activities. We lead our individual lives. I'm definitely not in love with Shyam. I'm not in awe of him either. I respect him and he is a great person to be with.

If there is nothing to the relationship, how is it that Shyam's wife Neera, is against her husband attending film festivals with you?

I don't think Neera is against it at all. I've never experienced any bad vibes from her. I visit the Benegals quite often. When the three of us went location hunting the other day, everyone thought we were one big family. During shootings,

Neera even takes care about what I eat because she knows I have a weak stomach.

Those close to you say that your lack of interest in commercial cinema is just a facade. Can you name some projects besides Roti Kapda Aur Makaan ***that you have refused?***

I don't remember the names, but there have been quite a few offers. One of them was from Salim-Javed. I agreed to do *Shakti,* because it's a good role and I'll be working with good artistes like Dilip Kumar, Amitabh and Raakhee. And I like Ramesh Sippy. He is a good director. I do 'art' films because I am attached to them. To be frank, I'd love to do a few commercial films, because that's where the big money is. Film acting is the only profession in India where you are paid enormous amounts of money for doing precious little. My problem is that I'm not cut out for the unnatural mode of living which working in commercial cinema entails. The schedules are so disjointed. There is no personal communication. A person like me is easily brushed aside as a non entity. I find it an insult to the individual in me. If people feel I'm frustrated, I have no explanations. Besides, it's not that I grab every 'art' film that comes my way. Whenever my instinct has told me that a particular film might not do well, I've held myself back, and in many cases, my instinct has proved right. The point is that I'm damn lazy. If I had a lot of money to travel, I'd probably do nothing for a living. And let's face it, things have been comfortable these past years. I don't have to act at all.

On one hand you say that you are out of the rat race, but your photographs are splashed in magazines month after month. Isn't that a contradiction?

Publicity is publicity, okay? It's got nothing to do with art and commercials. For reasons unknown to me, I've been turned into a controversial figure. Shabana, when she entered films, said she would not do commercial films. But she did! I said I won't and I didn't. The controversy started when I signed *Shakti.* I did it merely as an experiment, but the press pounced on me! It would be ridiculous on my part to shun interviews and ban the publication of my photographs. I speak to journalists because they come to me. Tomorrow if they stop coming, it wouldn't bother me.

Why do you protest so much? Why can't you accept criticism?

I protest against all wrongs — even if it's futile. The queue at the bus stop. I protest because people break the queue and run for the bus, causing inconvenience to other passengers. I don't protest for personal gains. I think you are getting influenced by the article written on me by a friend. The friend has summed me up as an antithesis of myself. I was terribly upset when I read the article. As for criticism, I have a friend who criticizes me all the time. How do I react? First, I fight. Then, I listen, and after that I understand. But I don't change. I'm too old to change. At 23, one's aims are set in life. Changing becomes difficult.

In your attempt to appear original, you aim more at being unlike others than being yourself. Why is originality such an obsession?

This charge is ridiculous because I never go to parties except those hosted by close friends. With such friends it's never a party, it is just being together. I dress to feel comfortable. I wear jeans because they are convenient for driving — I do a lot of driving. For trial shows, I prefer kaftans, so that I can relax totally. I wear saris quite often but seldom deck up in the conventional sense. I wear sari like a sarong, because I'm comfortable with it. I avoid doing it at social functions because it's not acceptable.

Those who know you, insists that you drop names and mention books to show off.

Do I talk about my favourite authors? I have no favourite authors. When I go to buy a book I read the blurb, and then decide whether I should buy the book or not. If after reading a particular book, I like it, I purchase 10 more copies and distribute them amongst my friends. I don't believe in intellectual dialogues. One has to be knowledgeable to be able to discuss things. I'm not a knowledgeable person. All I have are my experiences.

Those who interact with you, find you cold and unapproachable.

I've heard about this... Rather, read about it. Kumar Sahani is supposed to have told somebody what a cold person I am. When I read about it I was deeply hurt. How can someone who doesn't know me, speak so categorically? Later, when I signed his film, we spoke about the episode. Today, all

barriers are broken. He is tremendously happy with my work. I don't think I am a cold person, but yes, I'm aloof. Superficially, I can click with anybody but I don't achieve long-term relationships easily. I don't like people who are loud. I don't have anything against them, but I'm not comfortable in their presence.

You keep emphasising that your friends belong to the middle class. Don't you think that this awareness in itself is making a class distinction?

A friend of mine once asked me if I had any rich friends. That was the first time I got down to thinking about it. I was born and brought up in a middle class family and if I discuss it, why should I be called superior? I don't ask people, 'Which hotel do you frequent?' or 'Where do you get your clothes tailored?' All I said was that working in films leaves very little scope for contact with the outside world. I didn't mean that stars don't have friends outside films. They do, but the schedule of double shifts and dubbing is so tight, that it's always the outsider who is adjusting to the star's convenience. This inequality, according to me, is against the ethics of any friendship. The effort should be mutual.

Last, are you in love with Vinod Khanna and on your way to becoming a Rajneesh bhakt?'

Thanks for the parting shot. Is this because I wear a lot of saffron or is it because I make frequent trips to Pune? Vinod is an aid. I've been to the ashram years before with a journalist friend doing an article on the Rajneesh cult and I took photographs. Now, I visit the place whenever I want to, but no, I haven't taken to *sanyas* and I'm not in love with Vinod Khanna. And, for God's sake, don't misquote me. I'm fed up of being misquoted. It's painful.

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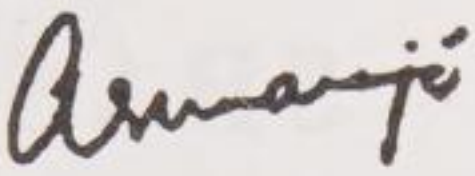
'What comes across about Smita in this interview, even after all these years is her stark honesty, her ability to call a spade a spade even if it was unflattering to her. Her gut reaction, which she never tried to suppress was her strength. In the latter years though, this spontaneous reaction to things and people was diffused (actually suppressed) because the industry and the film press taught (or rather badgered) her to be diplomatic (or dishonest). She was much

misunderstood too and found it hard initially to be accepted for what she was. The point was that nobody cared to know the real Smita. In this glamorous world of showbiz, images are built and people have to conform to them. In the process, the real person with her complexities is lost, sacrificed at the altar of popular image, or stardom. She realised it too, and the struggle continued, as her real self tried to find the space to exist.'



(Aruna Raje, friend of Smita Patil)

1978

SHASHI KAPOOR

The busiest star in the film firmament, Shashi Kapoor is available for interviews in studios, in-between studios or in Shabana Azmi's house. He prefers to keep his own home Press free — and sacrosanct. Once with Shashi is never enough. He's a happening that requires at least a week. So for nine days, I doggedly pursued every footstep of Shashi's acceding only to his requests, terms, conditions and prices with numerous producers in his car and in between shots. What follows is a diary, factual but fascinating. Like Shashi Kapoor himself.

❀❀

Thursday, January 26: We are at Prithvi Jhopda, Shashi's Juhu residence. He points to the building coming up opposite his cottage. The incomplete structure has began to take on the concrete shape of a long cherished dream. Shashi's dream. And Jennifer's. The resurrection of Prithvi Theatres. 'I guess that's something I've really wanted all my life,' Shashi whispers with stars in his eyes. A moment later they disappear and a different sort of glint appears. He yells out to friend Tiger and asks him to take a message over to the Azmi house. The message is brief: 'I'm coming for lunch.' The news creates a small storm in the Azmi household. A worried Shaukat Azmi charges into the kitchen to see if there is enough food for everyone.

Lunch looks like a scene straight out of *Khatta Meetha*. Everyone is busy talking and laughing. Shabana says to no one in particular, 'Baba is standing and eating because he wants some attention.' Her brother replies with a trace of annoyance, 'That's because there's no place. Do you want me to sit on your lap?' Shaukat Azmi is wailing. 'Will someone please tell my husband that he doesn't need to diet?' Shashi only says, 'In this house, everyone is neurotic except the father.'

While everyone is enjoying the meal, I cannot help thinking about Shashi and Shabana and their rumoured affair. No relationship can stay hidden for long. Last year around the same time, things were different. Shashi and Shabana used to bubble in each other's company. Today, Shabana looks bored, and Shashi tired. I search their faces for tell-tale clues of their beautiful friendship. There are none. No putting special tidbits in each other's plates. While leaving, I

discover that the make-up man hasn't eaten. 'He's so shy,' says Shabana. I feel it's something else. Shashi had eaten up the make-up man's quota.

My editor calls in the evening. 'How did it go? How was Shashi?' he asks. 'Okay' I tell him, 'but Shabana says Shashi's a big fraud and she told me to tell him so.'

Friday, January 27: It seems a promising day. We are at the dubbing theatre in Rajkamal Studios. The film is *Trishna*. Shashi's in a crazy mood. He's teasing everyone, calling Raakhee *ullu ki patthi*, and Shabana *chudail*. He's hitting the unit men, irritating Anil Ganguly and calling the recording manager *nasbandi*. No one seems to mind. There are several visitors in the room.

A gorgeous female visitor on the sets, opens her bag and takes out a photograph of Shashi. He looks at it and both of them blush. There's also an old man, a foreigner. He's confused as to why our Hindi films have each and every dialogue dubbed? He tries talking to the unit men — a sheer waste of effort since they can't understand each other. Then there are two cartoons from Delhi. They're sitting behind me and fighting. They're arguing about who'll muster up enough courage to approach Shashi when he finishes dubbing. Both are terribly nervous. So one starts perspiring and the other goes to sleep.

There's a break. The last shot needs another take because there's some disturbance. Everyone looks behind from where snores rip through the air. It's the cartoon from Delhi who's fallen asleep in his chair. I watch Shashi. He's angry. He tries to wake the sleeping beauty without losing his cool. 'They've come for money,' he complains. 'They represent some trade paper. And I don't give money to the Press!'

A unit boy enters with a tall glass and a bottle of sugarcane juice. Why sugarcane? I ask. 'Because,' he winks, 'there's a time, place and mood for everything.'

My editor calls in the evening. 'How was Shashi?" he asks. 'Quite, quite crazy,' I tell him. 'He has sugarcane juice while dubbing, tea while shooting, music when he's driving and he eats peanuts all the time!'

Saturday, January 28, 3 p.m.: I reach Rajkamal Studios.

Shashi hasn't yet arrived and everyone's waiting for him. I sit down to have a chat with the assistant director. He tells me crazy incidents about Shashi. About the time he was followed by producers to his outdoor locations because he had no dates to spare in Bombay. And about the time he had to shoot for three films simultaneously at 'Filmistan' studios.

4 p.m.: Sanjeev Kumar, who is also shooting for Yash Chopra's *Trishul,* wakes up from his forty winks and I while away some time talking to him about everything, from Sharmila Tagore to sandwiches, and rainy season to Rajesh Khanna.

5 p.m.: Someone informs me that Shashi has arrived. 'You're late,' I tell him. The only time he was late was when he was born, he corrects me. He explains that Yash Chopra had told him to take it easy because Amitabh would be arriving late.

5.15 p.m.: We go into his make-up room. He is immediately besieged by producers who swallow him up in a babble of business. The smile fades from Shashi's face. He cannot disguise his emotions any longer. He's totally fed up and it shows.

5.30 p.m.: The producers have left, but the room is still crowded. There are other people waiting, and as long as people wait for him, he can have no privacy, no peace of mind. The Shashi of yesterday was cheerful. Today, he appears tired. His reflection in the mirror seems drained. He makes sluggish attempts at making conversation. He can only repeat the stale quotes he's been feeding us for years. 'In a woman the first thing that attracts me are her eyes. Then come her boobs, bottom and brains — in that order,' he says. And, 'If anyone wants to be with Shashi Kapoor, he'd better have a sense of humour.'

5.45 p.m.: The silence between us has become uncomfortable. Somehow, we cannot communicate. The vibes are bad so I tell him I'm leaving. He looks grimly at me, understanding. He rattles off his timetable for the next day adding. 'That's if you wish to continue with the feature.' I leave without saying goodbye. My editor calls in the evening. 'How was Shashi?' he asks. Disappointing, I confess. 'He reads Ruth Jhabvala and Shakespeare and Ayn Rand. But he doesn't read Daphne du Maurier — and she's my favourite.'

Sunday, January 29: He's suffereing from Saturday's hangover and he's bugged because he missed the chance of a lifetime the previous evening. Jennifer wasn't in town and she'd left behind a gorgeous foreigner friend who needed looking after — and Shashi had promised to do so. Unfortunately for him, he had gone and drooled about the date on the *Trishul* sets and Amitabh, Yash Chopra and Sanjeev, green with envy offered to help out but naturally Shashi declined all the offers gracefully. 'At least call her to the sets,' Amitabh coaxed. Shashi smugly refused. So the three men decided to teach Shashi a lesson. They didn't pack up till 8 p.m. As if that wasn't enough, Shashi's daughter Sanjna woke him up early morning and pestered Shashi takes her for a swim. He spent the whole afternoon listening to her gab about school and her teacher. In the evening, he wanted to attend J. Krishnamurthy's lecture but Sanjna snuggled close to him and begged, 'Papa, don't go.' So he didn't. 'I always listen to her, she's my *jaan*,' says Shashi.

My editor calls in the evening. How was Shashi? he asks. 'Cross,' I reply, 'but Neetu Singh says he's a big tease.'

Monday, January 30: His expression says he's surprised to see me. He thought I'd get bored with him halfway through the feature. As I approach him, he smiles. No Hi there, no Hello, no How are you? The film is *Gautam Govinda*. He's playing a police inspector — and needs an instant hairdo. The make-up man settles it by curling up his locks and fixing them with hairpins. Two on either side and two in the centre.

Lunch time is a debate competition between Shashi and director Subhash Ghai. The topic of discussion is, as always, women. 'Why is it that girls are smarter than boys?' asks Shashi. 'My Sanjna is only 10 but she's my guru!' He insists that his sons were not as clever as Sanjna when they were 10. 'As for me,' he laughs, 'I used to run around naked when I was 10!' He goes on with his boring argument. 'Indian women,' he rants, 'are the biggest frauds. What their left hand does, their right doesn't know!' I ask why this antagonism against women? 'Antagonism?' he screams. 'My dear I just love them. I can't do without them!'

Having announced how much he loves my breed, he promptly begins ignoring me and my colleague. He walks

out of the room without a word. He neither asks if we'd like to join him on the sets, nor requests us to wait for him in his make-up room. My colleague and I are hurt by his lack of consideration. We decide to go home. And I ask myself if this is the same man who once told me, 'A human being may be born a man, but it's his manners that make him a gentleman.'

My editor calls from the office. 'And how was Shashi today?' I sigh. 'I don't think I want to meet him tomorrow!'

Tuesday, January 31: We are in 'Filmcity'. The place is miles away from China Creek, and Shashi's shooting for Nadiadwala's *Amar Shakti*, on an Indianised *Ben Hur* set. There's a huge crowd, sweltering restlessly in the heat, climbing over one another to get a better view. After all that, all they manage to see is a couple of flashing swords. The scene has Shashi and villain Roopesh Kumar. They come face-to-face, fight, fall, get up, embrace and then part. Shot over, Roopesh goes off in his car, Shashi in his.

A little further, Sarika is shooting for *Devta*. Shashi takes Sarika by the hand and says as always '*Mujhe* Shashi Kapoor *kehte hain*.' She giggles and says, '*Mujhe* Sarika *kehte hain*.' They are so trite. It's difficult for me to suppress a yawn.

My editor calls from the office. 'And what was it like today?' he enquires. 'I'm bored,' I tell him, 'but Sarika says he's verrrrrrry chweet.'

Wednesday, February 1: Shashi's acquired an additional qualification. He's become a film producer. He's producing Shyam Benegal's next script. He tells us all about the *muhurat* held in Lucknow. The entire cast was present: Shashi, Jennifer, Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah and Nafisa Ali. It was the most hectic *muhurat* ever, says Shashi. It started on time but the artistes were so nervous that they faced the camera as white as chalk. Even Shyam Benegal was nervous. 'The only two who were calm and collected were Nafisa Ali and the horse.' I've never, never seen Shashi like this. It's a new, ambitious Shashi altogether. Like Shatrughan Sinha, he's at his best when he talks about himself. He explains why he chose Shyam Benegal. 'If I invested my money in a film made by Prakash Mehra, Prayag Raj or

Manmohan Desai, the profit would be quicker. But Shyam has his own intoxication — and I want to get intoxicated.'

It's my editor again in the evening. 'And what happened today?' he asks. 'He was marvellous,' I say enthusiastically. 'But Prayag Raj, his director says he's a pain in the neck!'

Thursday, February 2: Am I or am I not on the scent of a sizzling scoop? Shashi's untraceable. No one knows where he is. His butler, whose standard answer is '*Saab ghusal mein hai*,' keeps saying, '*Saab ghar pe nahin hain*.' His housekeeper who deserves a medal for her efficiency, sounds irritated: 'Will you enquire at the office? I don't know where he is,'. And his office staff seems to be on a holiday. No one answers the phone for ages.

Finally, someone picks up the receiver and a flustered voice asks, what I want 'Shashi Kapoor?' the voice says finally, 'Even we're trying to locate him. There's too much confusion now, will you call in an hour's time please?' The receptionist at 'Roop Tara' studios is hysterical. 'Roop Tara, good evening. The film is *Gautam Govinda* and Shashi was expected in the morning but he hasn't yet come and everyone is waiting, thank you.' At six o'clock, I finally meet him in the studios. I ask him if he had been kidnapped? 'No *yaar*,' he drawls. 'The flight from Lucknow was delayed.' Meanwhile, his shooting has been cancelled. So he talks about what he likes and what he thinks he likes. It all sounds very confusing. First he says that what attracts him about a woman are her boobs and bottom. A minute later, he says what he actually likes in a woman is originality and simplicity. And no sooner are these words out of his mouth, than he says he doesn't like women with brains. And yet, I've seen him restless as a cat on a hot tin roof when in the company of dumb beauties.

This anyway is the real Shashi. The lined tiredness, the occasional sparkling brown eyes and the fangs. Not to mention those eternal self-contradictory statements!

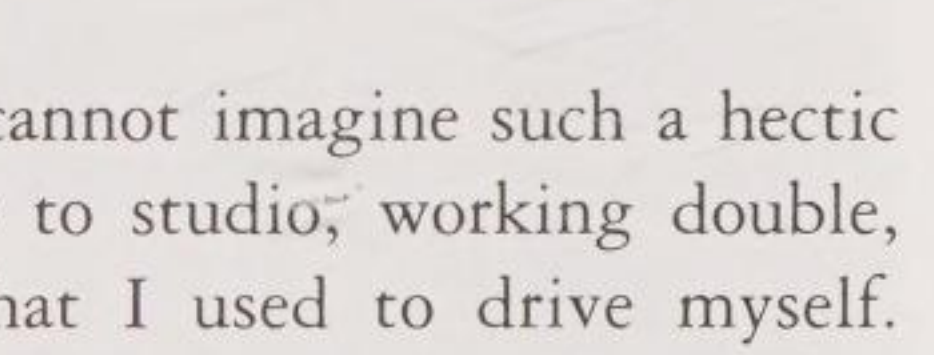
In the evening it's my editor again. 'Did anything new happen?' he asks. 'I don't think I can take any more of this!' I scream. 'And, even Jennifer, I believe has become allergic to Shashi. She has to take anti-allergic pills every day!'

Friday, February 3: We are on the sets of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*. The door of his luxurious make-up room is ajar. People walk in and out with a peculiar air of familiarity. He doesn't seem to mind. He jabbers non-stop on varied topics, while he gets ready. Journalists: 'They're all bitches!' The framed photograph of himself which hangs on the make-up room wall: 'Some heroine sneaked in when I wasn't here and kissed it on the lips. Come and see the lipstick marks for yourself if you don't believe it!' Zeenat Aman: 'I wonder if she still makes courtesy calls on Raj Kapoor / Padmini: He met the actress on a Madras flight: 'She hasn't changed a bit, since *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* and *Mera Naam Joker*. It's sad that a person whom RK once treated as a VIP has become a nonentity now.'

I watch as he talks to his visitors. He snaps at one of his guests. I tell him he's getting ill-tempered. 'I'm getting impatient,' he replies. 'I've realised that people are not what they seem. And I hate being taken for a ride by them.' On the sets he confesses he's nervous about *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*... Raj Kapoor enters, and a pall of silence descends on the sets. What Dabboo says is right. Shashi and Raj are more colleagues than brothers. Shashi's man is waiting with his eye drops. Shashi puts a drop in each eye, closes them and leans back. Now I understand.

❀❀

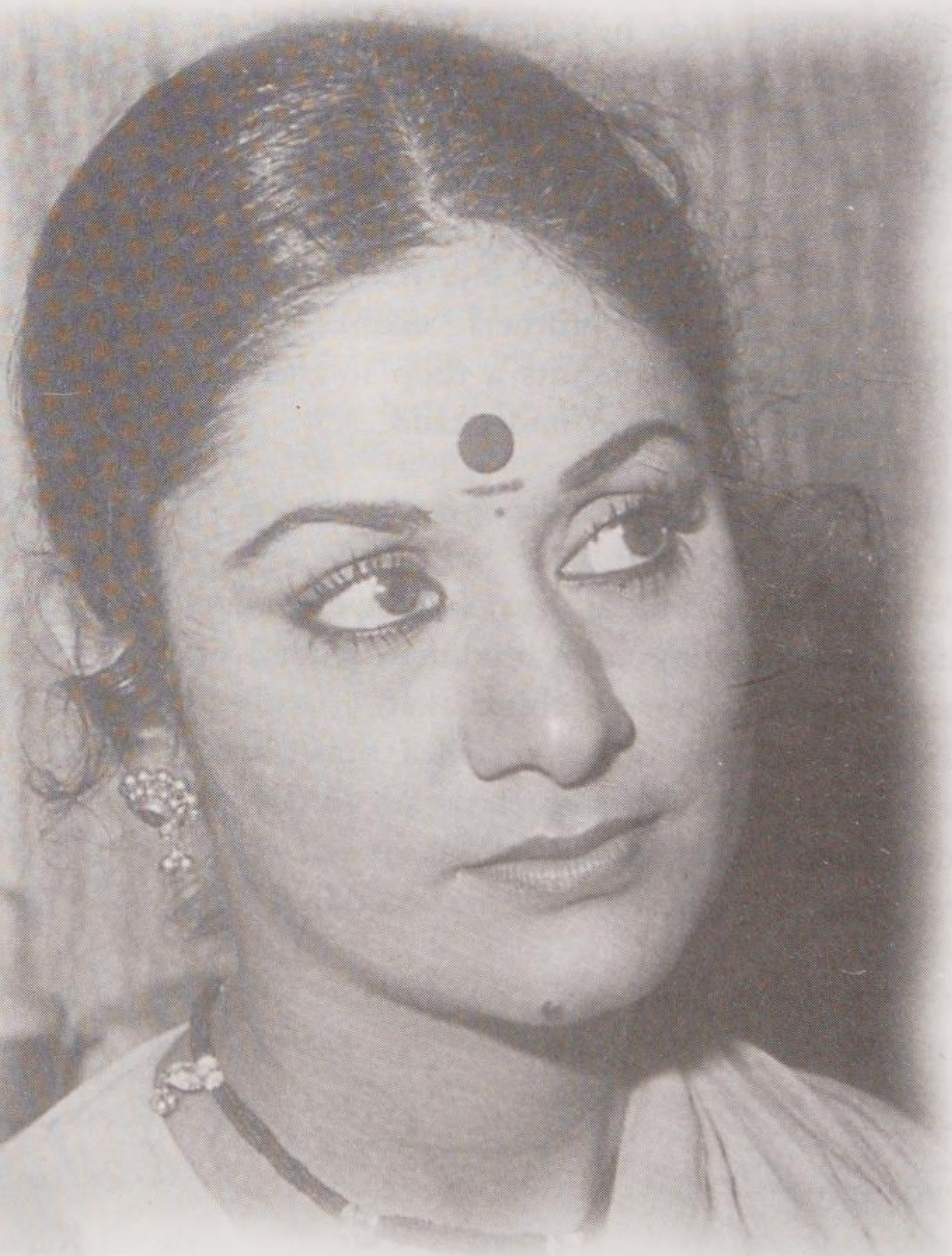
'What a life... What a day... I cannot imagine such a hectic life today, hopping from studio to studio, working double, triple shifts... And to think that I used to drive myself. Today, I will not move out if I don't have a driver. I've become a man of leisure. I spend all my time in my air-conditioned room, eat, drink, sleep and read. Today, all my free time is spent with my grandchildren.'



(Shashi Kapoor)

1978

ARUNA IRANI



The summer of her discontent is over. Her life has been a wasteland of relationships, the skeletal remains of which still linger in her memory and eyes. Her eyes sometimes look back into the past to read and re-read the closed chapters of her life, and try to understand why so many relationships have produced nothing, not even a hope for the morrow...

❀❀

She was 12, innocent and silly. He was handsome, rich and generous. The girls teased her about him. And the boys teased him about her. She was Aruna Irani. He was a shy classmate. 'I think he felt sorry for me more than anything else,' said Aruna remembering the time gone by 'I was a dirty little child, much too ordinary for anyone to notice. I wore the same uniform the whole week. My mother used to tightly plait my hair so that it wouldn't have to be done again for the next two weeks. Combing my hair every day was a waste of time. We hardly spoke to each other. He was too shy to take the initiative and I was too busy bullying others. If someone gave me two annas, I would not write his name on the blackboard. There was one girl I blackmailed openly. I would take away her pocket money and steal her lunch. The whole class knew about it but nobody had the guts to complain to the teacher. Not even him.

'He was nice to me. That's all. It was not a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. It wasn't even a brother-sister one. He had all the things I couldn't afford. So he'd pay for my class picnic and buy me ice-cream. He even used to pay my bus fare. There's one incident I'll never forget. I hadn't paid my fees and the teacher punished me. I had to write 'I will pay my fees on time', 2000 times. I made my friends write out my punishment. But the teacher found out because it was all in different handwritings. And since my fees still hadn't been paid, she threw me out of the class. I couldn't afford to pay the fees. If there was sufficient money, my mother would have given it to me. But we just didn't have it. I'll never forget that while I was standing outside in humiliation, that shy boy came and offered me the money for my fees.

'A few months later he left school. His father had been transferred. I didn't miss him. By the end of the term, I had

to leave school too. We couldn't afford the fees. I never saw him after that till 17 years later, when he came to ask me for my dates! He was Pramod Khanna - Vinod Khanna's brother. And he was already married.

If Aruna was a rowdy tomboy in school, by adolescence she had retreated into a shell. And it was as a shy girl who attended stage rehearsals, that Aruna met a boy as bashful as herself. An enormously talented actor who went on and made a great name for himself on Hindi screen. The informal theatre atmosphere should have helped their friendship blossom. It didn't. Aruna and the young man communicated through a mediator who carried messages of admiration from one to the other.

'His presence made me nervous,' Aruna recalls. 'If he ever came in during my rehearsals, I would forget my lines and start stammering. Nothing really happened between us. He went his way, and I went mine. Years later, we met again. Both of us had switched to films by now and we did a few movies together. I remember one day after pack-up the unit was returning in a small van. He was sitting next to me. It was a long drive and there was a strong wind blowing. Suddenly my saree flew over his face and he caught it. My heart missed a beat. Nothing happened. He did not propose. I didn't confess love. It's a fact that we liked each other but neither of us took the initiative and when he did, it was too, too late.' The man, obviously, was Sanjeev Kumar, but she vehemently denied it.

Though she was a talented and experienced stage artiste, Aruna only managed to get work in C-grade films. Until she bagged a small role in *Gunahon Ka Devta* opposite comedian Mehmood. Initially, Mehmood was hesitant about working opposite a new girl. But he had no choice, since none of his regular co-stars were available. Shobha Khote had got married, Helen was very busy and Mumtaz had switched to lead roles. It was the first time Aruna was working with an established star. On the first day of shooting with Mehmood, she forgot her lines. After many retakes an angry Mehmood screamed 'What the hell do you think you are doing?' And Aruna burst into tears. As the shooting progressed the initial friction dissolved into affection — and finally into love.

Mehmood helped Aruna's career as no one had. Soon, the two had become a commercially successful pair in the way Mehmood and Shobha Khote once were and Mehmood's wife, who all along maintained a distance from her husband's career confessed, 'If I have any friend in this country, it's Aruna.'

But as stories about Aruna and Mehmood circulated in the industry, and gossip about their involvement reached her ears, the friendship between the two women turned sour. And inevitably, Mehmood and Aruna broke up! Today, all Aruna will say about that phase of her life is, 'If you meet the same man every day, something is bound to happen. Especially if that man has helped you when you desperately needed help. Mehmood is such a genuine person, one cannot help liking him. Had he proposed to me, I would have undoubtedly married him. He didn't.'

The next man in Aruna's life was a Sindhi businessman, who came to India to sign stars for a show he was holding abroad. One of the stars he contacted was Aruna. Because of the show, the two got to see a lot of each other and soon the businessman was even dropping by on her sets. It was obvious to everyone else that he was smitten by her. But like all good older sisters, Aruna was thinking only of what a fine husband he'd make for her younger sister, Chetna. After a few months in India, the Sindhi businessman went back home. But he did not forget Aruna. He'd call her long distance — once a week, sometimes twice. And one memorable day, after he had asked about everybody, he suddenly said, 'I miss you' — and abruptly hung up.

Ironically, Aruna couldn't attend the show which had brought them together. She met with an accident and was laid up for two months. But when the businessman next came to India, Aruna decided to clear the air between them. She asked him straight out if he would marry her sister. The poor guy was flabbergasted. He told Aruna he was in love with her. Not with her sister.

'My parents were very happy about it,' said Aruna. 'They wanted us to get married, but even this time, things didn't work out. His parents were against it, and he couldn't make

up his mind whether he wanted to please them or me. I hate men who have no mind of their own. The man I marry will have to be strong and sure of himself... Marriage in our country is a union of not just two individuals but also their families. If the boy's family cannot accept you, there's no point in getting married. After all, the man is going to spend 12 hours at the office and you'll be seeing more of his family than him. So if you know there's going to be friction, what's the point of getting into it?'

The Sindhi businessman was forgotten and rumours said that Aruna was in love again. This time with a producer. And he was so much in love with Aruna that he threw caution to the winds and openly tried to promote her career. He extended her role of a vamp to a second heroine. 'For God's sake, who told you all this?', Aruna frowned. 'The whole thing is a lie. It's true that the entire unit teased us and linked us together but there was nothing between us, nothing but this joke. He liked the appearance of Aruna Irani but he disliked the person He wanted a *sati savitri*. I couldn't understand his attitude. If you love someone, you accept her completely. You can't accept some aspects and reject others.'

The past was over and done with. Several closed chapters in a book without an end. But Aruna sometimes wonders how everything will work out for her. Because she doesn't believe in love. Not any more. And she's suspicious of happiness. Because it doesn't last. 'If I ever get married, it will be to an old man. After all, one gets married only for companionship. So instead of marrying a young man and being dragged through all the ups and downs of life, it would be much safer to settle for a man who's mellowed down. That's why I proposed to Dr. Shreeram Lagoo. But this is the story of my life, he didn't take me seriously...

'There's no such thing as love. It's just a name given to an emotion. What we call love is actually proximity. If you meet the same person day in and day out, you begin to think you are in love. But if you stay away for two months, don't see him, don't hear his voice, don't touch him, tell me where does that love go? They say that everyone has at least one bitter experience to live through. But I've been lucky.

All my relationships have ended with no hard feelings. None of them hate me today. We don't meet very often now, but an affection exists. If it didn't, they wouldn't fall back on me emotionally as they do.

'Love is a curse of God. The lucky ones don't fall in love. If you fall in love you're always looking for happiness. And what do you get? Heartaches. Pain. The trouble with me, the reason why I've always been so unlucky with men is that I give too, too much. They can't take it. They probably feel suffocated. I've reached a stage now when I do what I want. Not what is expected of me. I don't care anymore. Everyone says that times have changed, but inside every broad minded person is an orthodox mind and that's precisely why heroines pretend to be virgins. It's easy to criticize women involved with a married man, but isn't the man equally to be blamed? My sympathy is for the 'other woman'. Look what she endures. Though she loves her man, she can't live with him. She is not legally bound to him, but remains loyal till the end. She has no security, yet bears all the disgrace. Her sacrifice is much greater!

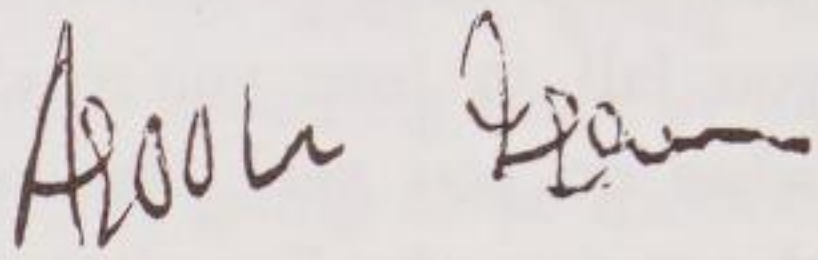
'If the wife suffers disgrace, it's because she has no choice. She's duty bound to the man. The 'other woman' does it knowing that there is nothing to be gained, no future. It's not easy. If only these wronged wives could swap places with the 'other woman', we'd see who has more resistance. In the end, it's a question of rights. And the rights have always been with the wife. The tussle between the husband, wife and the 'other woman' may go on for a few months or a few years. But in the end, it's always the wife who wins. The man goes back to her, always. And he should.

'It's like a game of toss. They always call the turn — Heads I win, Tails you lose. But the question is: If everything is always theirs, then what is mine?'

❀❀

'I was definitely more emotional those days. Today, I'm able to cope with the pressures of life because I'm older and know the remedies. Now, when I'm confused, I seek a friend. When I'm low, I go to the health club. By then, I'm so

physically exhausted that I don't have the energy to feel sad. The first time I fell in love, I hurt badly. In the years to follow, I learnt to look after myself. Even now, love hurts but I'm able to contain my sorrow. Being older, I know how to help myself.❜



(Aruna Irani)

1978

RISHI KAPOOR

He's hypochondriac, but confident. He's impersonal, but friendly. He's careless but a perfectionist. He shuts up if sitting with a better conversationalist, but is assertive. He's haughty, but hilarious. He's chubby but among the best stars in the market today. He's Rishi Kapoor. And my job was to follow him. For a few days.

❀❀

Tuesday, June 20: It was raining. Rishi (Chintu) was on the sets of *Naseeb*, trying to handle director Manmohan Desai's bad mood. This soon put Rishi in a bad mood too. I kept out of 'Bad Mood's' way by chinwagging with Manmohan's son Ketan, and Rishi's true love Neetu Singh. Ketan spoke about his injured toe and Neetu spoke about her London trip. 'I shopped for more nighties, saris, and kitchen stuff.' Mama Singh was also around, and inevitably the conversation turned to Chintu who was wearing a T-shirt with 'Forever' printed across it. Mama Singh said, 'Chintu is very superstitious. Once he was flying out of Bombay for location shooting and had come to say bye to Neetu. He was wearing this same T-shirt, so I joked and said, 'Goodbye, Forever! You won't believe this, but just for that, he cancelled his flight and left only the next day.'

There was commotion on the sets. A fire scene was being shot. Neetu arranged her poncho, Rishi donned his cap, everything was set to roll. But during the take, a part of the burning curtain fell on Chintu's leg and all hell broke loose. Neetu began screaming and doing other hysterical things not required for the shot. Manmohan Desai looked as though he had been pole-axed, and his spectacles slipped down his nose. Everyone went mad except Rishi, who brushed Neetu aside, and stamped the fire out, quite calmly.

For the next 20 minutes it was 'Chintu are you okay? Chintu, why don't you rest for a while?' and 'Chintu, shall we call the doctor?' It was clear that he loathed attention. I asked him if he had hurt himself? He replied with an aggressive, 'no!'

Thursday, June 22: Chintu again, after a day's gap. I began to realise he's much less of a turn-off than he seems. Today, he was doing a *dishoom-dishoom* shot in Ravi Tandon's *Jhootha Kahin Ka* with Rakesh Roshan. The scene showed Rakesh

getting married to Neetu, when Chintu gatecrashed to sort things out. Chintu thought the scene was absurd. 'Would any sane person do such a thing? So what if he loves the girl? It's madness! And to think that I do five similar shots a week. I stand and say the same lines to five heroines, every week. Sunil Dutt was right. We've given the audience so much ganja they can't appreciate State Express any more.'

He excused and went off to give his shot. I chatted with Chintu's secretary, until Chintu returned with Rakesh. Somehow, the topic turned to telephones. Chintu had a lot to say. 'Half the telephones in the city have gone bust. The 52, 53, 54, 57 exchanges have stopped working.' He thought about other gloomy things. 'The weather is lousy... I wonder why we should work at all?'

The fight director standing nearby, started to show Chintu how to do his next shot, which bugged him even more. 'How many times?' he said reflectively. 'How many times have I told you; I will not kick anyone for a shot? *Main laat nahin marta*.' The fight composer worked out a different bit of action. One thing about Chintu. He's no good for kicks.

Nothing else really earth-shattering happened. At pack-up time, Chintu came limping out of the set, buoyant no more, his ankle sprained. Chintu said plaintively, 'I'm hurt.' Oh, how helpless, I thought. How lost. (Where was Neetu? In Mysore, I remembered).

He's grown up fast. He's only 25 and few boys of his age can afford or even dream of the extravagance he's so casually accustomed to. I remember watching him paint blood on his chin today, before the fight sequence. He held the brush with the ease of a professional. And temper and all, he's still more a colleague than a star. Humble when asking for instructions. Unremitting when he's working. Amiable when he's being directed. Polished and irresistible when he's being contrite. Some people say he's a swinger. You know, I don't think he is.

Friday, June 23: He complained today that he'd never seen the inside of a real, honest-to-goodness magazine office, so I invited him to 'Super'. He was shooting at The Oberoi Sheraton and the big news of the day from Rishi Kapoor — the hypochondriac, was that he had flu. 'Oh, so that's today's

ailment,' I said. 'What do you mean, today's ailment?' he growled. Chintu, the Aggressive Young Man. 'First day, you got burnt. Second day, you got hurt. Today, you've got flu. Don't you know any other way of attracting attention?'

He laughed. '*Kamaal hai*, this is too much. I can't help it if I'm sick. My God, I'm really sick. Why can't you take me seriously? Why can't anyone take me seriously?' Poor Chintu! No one takes him seriously. Not even Prem Chopra. Prem Chopra was walking around in a sexy bathrobe showing his hairy legs, smiling to himself and humming. I asked him what the next shot involved? 'I'm kind of promoting this boy... What's his name? What do you call him?...Chintu? Is that his name?' The shot involved Prem Chopra, Sujit Kumar and Chintu, drinking a toast to success. As soon as it was over, Chintu ran into his room and flopped face down on the bed. 'I'm feeling very weak,' he moaned.

The hypochondriac was at work again. During lunchbreak Prem Chopra cracked terrible jokes. Next, Chintu, his two female visitors and I, left for my office. I tried to prepare him for the worst. I told him it was a filthy hole overrun with cockroaches, rats and lizards. He believed me. The minute we entered the building, what do you expect, chaos ruled. The watchman, the lift operator, the peons, all of them went berserk. All the people from the neighbouring offices came out to ogle. A couple of brave guys came to take his autograph, the timid ones hung around biting their nails. The canteen boy, who never smiled, today walked in grinning. He brought special *kadak chai*, for our special guest.

Chintu was dazed. Despite his flu, he had three score and ten questions, and his tone was racy, and his gestures eloquent. 'Your office has more pictures than people. How do you live without air-conditioning? And where are your friends? The rats, lizards..?'

I had the last laugh. 'There's one person in Chintu's life he cannot live without — spotboy, Madhukar. He's Chintu's shadow. Madhukar attends to Chintu's calls, passes on his messages, keeps his cigarettes, *paan bahar* tin, *supari*, wallet, he even attends to his master's guests. Their rapport is enviable, their mutual need for each other, intense. When

Rishi frowns, Madhukar brings him the '555' packet. No words are wasted between them. They have a lot in common. Both are introverted and uptight. Madhu (as Chintu calls him) is protective about his master's privacy. Today, he told me not to arrive before 4 p.m. as the shooting (for *Dhan Daulat*) was an afternoon shift.

Chintu, Sujit Kumar and Prem Chopra were sharing a room. You couldn't meet three more dissimilar people. Prem Chopra smiled to himself and cracked some more jokes. Sujit Kumar seemed totally hung-up on his own body. He said, 'My body is my shop. If I don't keep it fit, nobody will buy it.' Chintu spoke about his other co-stars: 'Jaya Sudha is very good. Rameshwari...'he cleared his throat...'Well, I don't know because I haven't begun shooting with her yet. Bindiya Goswami...'he cleared his throat again...'Bindiya would suit me in the long run...' Next, came the day's health bulletin. 'I have a sore throat.'

The shot was delayed and Chintu whiled away two long hours playing cards. It was his lucky day for he won all the games.

'I've never won in all my life,' he said. 'This is a record.' Then after a pause announced, 'I... think I'll call Mysore.' Neetu was shooting in Mysore and this was the first time that Chintu had actually mentioned her. I wondered what was up between the two. There's definitely something brewing. It wouldn't have lasted so long otherwise. Sometimes, I think Chintu is like a cabbage: You can keep peeling layers away and there's always more inside.

Tuesday, June 27: Chintu was at B.R. recording theatre, dubbing for *Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan*. The throat apparently, was still sore, for I saw Madhukar dialing desperately for a doctor. When I reached the place, it was deserted. At the dot of 12.30 p.m., Chintu entered like a whirlwind, looking unaccountably smug. It was an experience watching Chintu dub. Shashi Kapoor does it sitting. Rajesh Khanna dubs standing up. Chintu enacts the scene all over again, while dubbing. Here's the real McCoy, all authenticity, no frills. Work transforms Chintu. The word 'Ready!' galvanises him. He dubbed one shot 10 times till it came out perfect. He's such a perfectionist that he sometimes even forgets to eat. That's not easy to believe, for Chintu

loves food. He pretends as if calories don't exist. 'I'm fat, ain't I?' he said, No trace of regret in his voice. 'I should lose weight. I should give up booze. I should cut out late nights. I should keep my promises.' 'Do you?' I asked him. 'Of course I do,' he retorted, 'I'm a good chap. I remember all my promises'. Till 7 p.m.' 'That's not a good chap,' I said, 'That's naughty.' 'Okay, I'm naughty. I'm also a lot of other things. I'm suspicious.'

That's true. He even sniffs at his *paan* before popping it into his mouth. 'Once I was given a *paan* with *tambaku*. I had hiccups all the way to Chembur. That did it. I decided I would never accept a *paan* from anybody without sniffing.'

Wednesday, June 28: Today, Chintu had a love sequence with Moushumi Chatterji in *Do Premi*. There was a mad crowd on the sets, it looked like a fancy dress ball with all the states of the country represented. One fat Sindhi lady, heavy with diamonds. A Punjabi lady who found Moushumi's Hindi very funny. A South Indian girl who went into raptures every time Chintu looked her way. A Marwari lady with a big *bindi* and a Hyderabadi couple.

As soon as the 'take' was over, they all rushed to Chintu for autographs. It was only routine for Chintu, an action he probably forgets the moment he returns the pen. But for them, it was an unforgettable moment.

The shot had to be redone, and for some reason, Chintu began laughing uncontrollably. Moushumi joined him, then Raj Khosla (the director) and finally the whole crew. The really funny thing was, no one knew what was so funny. Moushumi told me later, 'When Chintu and I vibe, we vibe really well. When we fight also, we really fight.' I think I know why. They click because they're outspoken. And they fight because they're poles apart, confusing but true. Crowds inspire Moushumi. They put Chintu off. Chintu, doesn't like strangers. I wonder how many true friends he really has. I watched him pacing up and down Mehboob Studio with his hands neatly folded behind him, and tried to figure out what Neetu saw in him. He is restless (Burnt? Hurt? Sore Throat?). He's got a bad figure. He's not tall. But he has a hearty laugh and a wonderful smile. He's a thoroughbred, a good listener. As I watched, a crowd of hangers-on, studio people, fans, secretaries had gathered around him. He

seemed disinterested and took a cigarette from Madhukar. I've noticed in the last few days that he smokes the most when he's upset, or when he's very happy.

'And how are you today?' I asked before saying goodbye. 'Today,' he smiled, 'Today, I'm absolutely fit. Today, I've no problems because 'she' is coming back.' And that, in a nutshell, it is. On my way out, I met Madhukar, who had gone out to confirm Neetu's flight arrival from Mysore. In a flash I understood what keeps Neetu and Rishi together.

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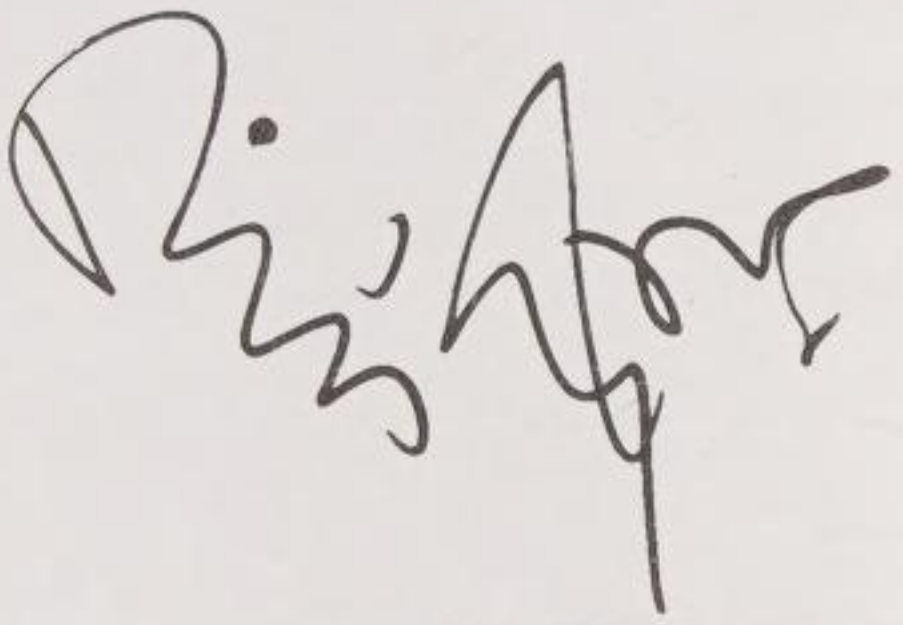
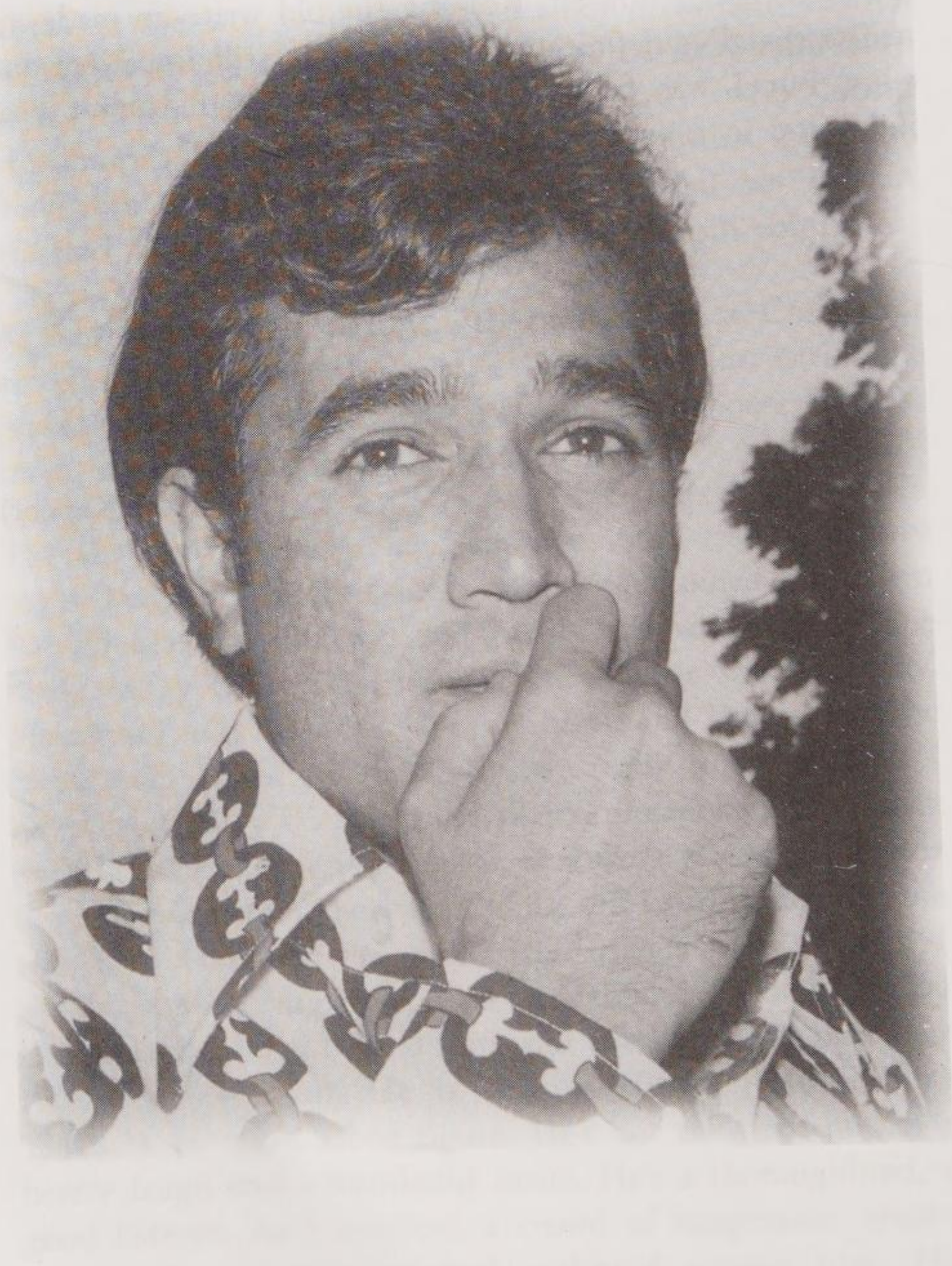
'Diary was such an unusual concept. It's so much more interesting when the journalist spends time observing the star, rather than the actor having to answer repetitive questions about himself. Reading the old write-up made me realise that I've definitely mellowed. I'm still impatient and edgy, but I was far more hyper then. I still cannot bear indulging in idle conversation with the media.'



(Rishi Kapoor)

1978

RAJESH KHANNA



My first impression of him is that he's a cold, proud man. My second, that his pride is a defence mechanism held between him and the rest of the world because he doesn't want anyone to know he's lonely... damn, damn, damn lonely. Doomed to be forever alone, in spite of the handful of people who have worked out the survival tricks of dealing with this sullen superstar, and are constantly around him.

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There is his right-hand man Prashant: An engaging conversationalist, and diplomat who speaks seven languages from English to Bhojpuri and starts all his phone conversations with '*namaste*' and ends with 'best of luck'. When his master is shooting, he tells you not to be punctual, because his master isn't. When Rajesh Khanna is not shooting, Prashant cooks up mysterious meetings to keep callers away.

Then there is Munna, Kaka's man-in-waiting, who smiles like Sanjeev Kumar but is better dressed. He wears only Wrangler shirts. And there's Raja Ram, the make-up man who's got a very easy job to do ever since Rajesh stopped breaking out in pimples. Raja Ram wears a belt with 'R' on it, and except for this sign of devotion, he speaks little.

Rajesh speaks little too. His poet-like face hides a steely person encased in freezing pride and loneliness. He doesn't need people. I can't understand how he consented to this diary. It took months of coaxing, months of planning and innumerable phone calls.

Friday, July 14: We are on the sets of *Aanchal*. It's like being in a village, with courtyards, trees, stable, haystacks. Even Amol Palekar is in a *dhoti*, and Raakhee in knee-high sari. Rajesh, who plays Amol's brother is in a *kurta* and holds a *lathi*. In the film, Raakhee plays Amol's beautiful second wife, and Rajesh worships her like a mother. In this particular scene, Rajesh is supposed to come running and whisk her off to the fields.

There's a timing problem between the two. Rajesh's entry should be marked with Raakhee ending her dialogue. An assistant gives the cue from behind a door, but it still takes

several retakes before the shot is okayed. Between shots, Rajesh is like an iceberg. He sits miles away from everybody. He makes no attempt to be friendly or talk.

I'm frankly confused. This is not the Rajesh who's been described to me. This one neither throws tantrums nor humiliates his co-stars. But he's sulky, peevish, a little starry. And he expects a lot of tolerance from others, when he creeps into his shell. Where's the warm, tender, poetic lover of the silver screen? This one's something that escaped from an ice factory!

Saturday July 15: Same film, same studio, same set. This shot is with Rajesh and Rekha. Good vibes here in real life, but all they do in the film, is squabble. In this scene, Rajesh is to dump a pot of milk on Rekha's head. At the last minute, she gets fussy. 'Empty it below my neck,' she demands. 'Not on my hair! I don't mind if my clothes smell of milk, but not my hair.' Rajesh flops into a chair. 'Fantastic!' he says sarcastically. 'Then what's the point?' 'Correct!' agrees Rekha. 'No point. So, let's do it tomorrow instead. I can't go for my next shift smelling of milk. If we do the scene, I'll have to go to the beauty parlour, shampoo and dry my hair, redo my make-up, redo my eyes —I'll be three hours late for my next shift!' 'Forget the make-up,' says Rajesh. 'I'm not Raakhee,' says Rekha. 'I don't have natural beauty.'

Rajesh is enjoying himself now. 'I understand. That's Prakash Mehra's shooting, and the hero is Amitabh, so you must be on time. I understand.' Finally, Rekha has her way and everyone packs up. Rajesh is now sitting under a tree with the producer, director and a few visitors. He's cool and blaséþ! Who would have thought that the ex-superstar would have put up with his leading lady's tantrums! He isn't ashamed of failure, in fact, even talks about it. 'I had my good days, I had my bad days — and I will have my good days again. I don't envy the man on top now, because I've been there myself. I know how he feels — every hit, every joy, every applause. I've tasted it all — and it's Wow!'

What a man! No one's risen like he did, and no one's fallen like he did.

Sunday July 16: On Sunday, Rajesh Khanna (*Kaka*) does not

shoot. 'It's the only day I can be with my children. I take *chutti*.' So he takes it easy. Wakes up anytime between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. His eyes open, he reaches for a cigarette. The day begins leisurely. 'Everyone complains I'm late for work. How can they be sure that when I'm lying in bed making smoke rings, I'm not working? My mind is busy. I'm thinking.' When he's through with smoking and thinking, he plays. 'I love playing with my children, especially Twinkle. I have an excellent rapport with her: Maybe because she's so much my opposite. Chinky's still too reserved and young. The second child is supposed to be the complexed one, anyway. You know, when I was a bachelor, the sound of my neighbour's kids shouting would make me boil with rage. But when your own child makes a racket, it's music. Better than R. D. Burman and Kishore Kumar!'

After play is lunchtime. Lunch at 'Aashirwad' is always more than a family affair, with people dropping in at all times. Wife Dimple occasionally cooks his favourite dishes. 'She a good cook,' he says. 'And it's a nice change. But I wouldn't like her to be in the kitchen all the time, when I can afford such a large staff!' Evening is strictly family time. The Drive-in theatre is a Khanna favourite. 'It's ideal for couples with young children!' says Rajesh. 'Very relaxing. Dimple may yawn half a dozen times, I may doze off, the kids may be more interested in the wafers and ice-cream, but it's still a nice outing.'

Monday July 17: He's dubbing for *Janata Hawaldar.* Outside, it's raining cats and dogs. Rajesh is in a foul mood, and has left strict orders that he's not to be disturbed, 'even if there's an earthquake.' No calls, no visitors, no snacks, no tea!' I have no choice but to wait until the weather clears and the mood mellows. Suddenly there's a commotion from within. Rajesh's voice is heard loud and clear all the way to the reception desk. 'I told you not to disturb me! Who the hell gave you permission to enter the room?' There's pin drop silence! The unit boy who had sneaked into the room to announce a guest, emerges chalk faced. The other unit boys gather around and console him. 'Never mind,' whispers one. 'He's in a bad mood. You should have kept away.' 'Even if he fired you, so what?' says another. 'He is your *saab*, you have to take it!' The discussion comes to a halt when the canteen boy arrives with omelettes and tea. It's for *Kakaji.*

He had ordered snacks at 6 p.m. But who'll dare re-enter the lion's den? No one's ready to chance it.

At 6.35 p.m. Rajesh comes out. The tea and omelettes are cold now, and the unit boys are all trying to look like part of the furniture. Kaka spots the fellow he has just blasted, and beckons him. 'Tell the canteen to send hot tea, omelette and toast.' The fellow turns to go, when Rajesh stops him. 'Wasn't too hard on you, was I?' he says. 'When I say don't disturb me, I mean don't disturb me. Now run along and get tea for me. I've got a headache.' The unit boy scurries off blushing with pleasure.

So he's got a volcanic temper. But he's generous too. Remember, he left a palatial bungalow as a parting gift to his ex-girlfriend? He gave a brand new Mercedes to Simple, his sister-in-law, when *Anurodh* was released. He said, 'No comments' — for seven years consistently about his Anju chapter, despite a hundred allegations and lies. He's got a big heart all right.

Wednesday July 19: A studio is the only place where time waits for man. And at last the man comes, in his white van with pink curtains. Great excitement. '*Kaka saab aa gaye*,' makes the rounds. His room has been kept ready for him, the air-conditioner turned on, fresh linen on the bed, costumes laundered and hung in the wardrobe and footwear shining. Khanna enters and relaxes on the bed. The film is *Aanchal* and there's still time for the shot.

Being Rajesh Khanna means two things: You've to be a natty dresser. And you've to be a real miser about your *masala* box. Rajesh is a fussy dresser. Wears only silk *kurtas*, and has suits in every imaginable colour. The *masala* box, is a large silver affair with half a dozen compartments, each containing a different type of *masala* and *supari*. There's a small spoon for dipping into these compartments and an extra red-and-black *potli* — the fisherwoman type with strings, for holding *elaichis*. Well, he's either sentimental about it all or just plain miserly, because in the nine days I followed him about, he didn't offer me *supari* even once!

Today, there are many visitors. The writer of *Dushman Dost* has come to fix shooting dates. Prem Chopra, Kaka's good friend since *Kati Patang*, has come to say 'hello'. Then there's

the writer of *Aavishkar*, whom Rajesh introduces as a man who's matured from tender love stories to crime and violence. 'What's happened?' Rajesh demands plaintively, 'Where has love and romance gone? Romance can be anything — an open window, flowers, poetry, rain, music. Today, there's no romance. No one has time for anything but getting into bed and raping.'

He's at an ebb. Probably his sinus is acting up. Probably something else. You can never say with Rajesh Khanna.

Saturday July 22: Today is a good diary day. Rajesh Khanna's on top of the world, ready to come out of his shell and talk. I'm flabbergasted that Khanna doesn't drink his water from a gold or silver glass. 'I don't believe in silver or gold,' he smiles. 'I believe in black and white. White is lovely but black is beautiful. I like dark women, they're sexy. I'm not particular that a woman should be *gori chitti* or even curvaceous. Appeal comes from mental rapport. I have to click mentally first.'

He adjusts a pillow behind his head, getting into the spirit of the conversation. 'My first mate was a big tease. We'd meet behind hedges to discuss lessons. She was smarter and used to help me with my studies. Mind you, I never borrowed her notes. No copying for me. Not even in those days. When I went to meet her father to ask for her hand, he asked me if I'd be taking over my family business. When he found out that I wanted to be an actor, he showed me the door. My second relationship was in college. I never attended classes. The day I did, my professor applauded. I found the staircase and the canteen more worthwhile. Pretty girls in *churidars* sat with friends, on the steps. One of them was a battleaxe, and we would be at each other's throats all the time. The whole college naturally assumed we were in love! One day, I found her sitting all alone in the canteen. I took a chair. Fifteen minutes passed, she didn't talk. I asked her if she was well? 'I'm getting engaged tomorrow,' she snapped. I asked her one question before she left. 'Be honest. Were you ever in love with me?' 'Yes', she cried and fled. I never saw her again.

'Everyone knows the next chapter (Anju Mahendru). But have I ever commented on it?' There were some beautiful moments in that relationship. Too bad it went sour. And

then my wife, Dimpi. Dimpi and I fell in love after marriage. Nothing anyone says can break our ties. She's matured with motherhood. She's developed constructive habits like reading. She's read all the best-sellers.

There's an interruption. Rajesh is summoned downstairs for the shot. It's a scene for *Dushman Dost* and Rajesh and Shatru are in C.I.D. uniforms. Rajesh gets up to change. 'With the young lady's permission, of course,' he says. I excuse myself, marvelling at his sudden radiant charm. I told you, today he's in a good mood.

Monday July 24: He's shooting at the airport for *Prem Bandhan*. The entire cast is present—Moushumi Chatterji, Vikram, Lalita Pawar, Rippy Singh and A. K. Hangal. It's the usual homecoming scene. Tears, laughter, hugs and the inevitable garland! Everyone seems to be happy. Except me. It's just not my day. I've had to fight my way through the massive crowd outside. When I finally land inside the building, the crowd is larger. Men, women and children are falling over themselves to get a close look at the stars. The light boys are going crazy trying to keep the mob under control and away from the lights. Suddenly the headlight boy yells at a little kid who's standing on the wires. 'Do you know you can die of an electric shock in two seconds?'

Thankfully, Kaka's man, Munna, spots me and manages to drag me out of the crowd. I'm on my way to Kaka when Moushumi shrieks, 'Hiiiii!' She makes me sit beside her and asks, 'How do you like my earrings?' After that, there's no stopping her. She tells me about her husband, her house, her daughter, her trip abroad. From the corner of my eye, I notice that Kaka's watching us coldly. Moushumi finally lets me go and I'm walking towards Kaka, when Vikram and Hangal stop me. 'In South India,' says Vikram, 'We call our tea boys '*Kaka*'. But in Punjab, *Kaka* is used as a term of affection! Ha, ha, ha!'

I can't get close to Rajesh now. There are some kids from Delhi who want his autograph; a middle-aged couple who request him to pose for a photograph and a bunch of teenagers who want to shake his hand. Finally, when the scene's done and pack-up announced, the police have to be called in to clear the way for the stars.

Tuesday July 25: Good things never last. Today, my last day for this diary is a real tough one, with silence, restraint and formalities. He's switched off and is aloof again. At the photo session, he loosens up a bit and flashes a whole range of adorable expressions — a consummate actor. But what a strange man! After nine days, I feel as though I've been circling a closed shell with no doors or windows. Expecting to get a peek inside by some miracle. But that happened oh-so-few-times. He's a closed book to most people. There are flashes of a warmer human being within that is today trapped in his new image. Today, he's unapproachable, moody, aloof, a world unto himself.

My last impression of him is the same as my first. He's lonely. Damn, damn, damn, lonely.

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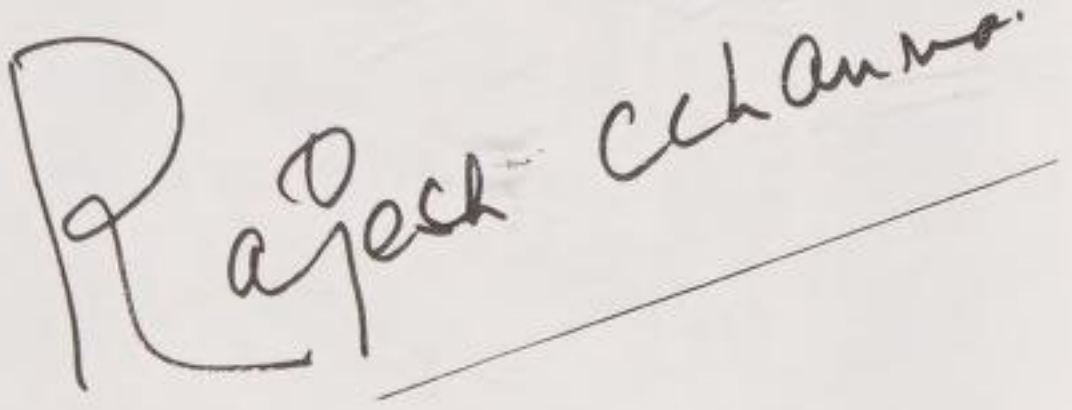
'The best judge of an interview is always your most intimate ones. They know everything about you — your thoughts and feelings — and if what you say in print, can retain their interests, it means you have not stagnated. I remember the reactions I received for this diary. It had the ability to surprise me and those around me. Interviews are quite similar to screen performances. One identifies only with the recent ones.'



(Rajesh Khanna)

1979

SHEKHAR KAPUR

Producers have come to me with conditional offers, 'Get Shabana for us and you can have a small role.!' I told them, 'Keep the role. I'll keep Shabana.' I'm not interested in deals,' says Shekhar. For the truth is that Shekhar is more than a handsome loverboy. Despite his powerful film making uncles — Chetan, Dev and Vijay Anand, Shekhar is determined to shape his own life as an actor. In the following interview, Shekhar reminisces:

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As a child, he was fat and lazy, but had a glutton's insatiable appetite. Even after 12 eggs for breakfast, he was hungry. There's a tale of him swallowing sleeping pills to put his hunger to sleep. His mother and father returning from a party, could do nothing to rouse him. He had hardly a pulsebeat, and lay in coma for 52 hours. Just when everyone had given up hope, the child wet his trousers. Shekhar Kapur was alive again. That was a small problem Shekhar had to fight for a long time. While in England, he was constantly being bullied by older school children. They didn't want to play with someone who still hadn't won the battle for supremacy over the bladder. Shekhar should have rightly been in a nursery school, but couldn't since there were no nursery schools in the neighbourhood.

Shekhar was unhappy, till his family moved to Delhi and he joined a class with boys of his own age. Here he had other problems. The long hair framing his plump face drove girls crazy. They chased him everywhere to tie his hair into pigtails. Shekhar was petrified. 'I was very withdrawn and shy,' he says.

At 14, he fell in love with the neighbour's daughter, but even that was a disaster. For a year, he stood at the gate every evening to catch a glimpse of her. 'But she never even smiled. I began cultivating her brother with gifts of cigarettes stolen from my father's pockets. That didn't help either. One day, as I was following her on my bicycle, she turned and stuck her tongue out. I was thrilled. The next morning, I rattled on her door, and when she opened it, told her all. Her answer was heartbreaking. She was in love with someone else. Elvis Presley.'

Shekhar fled to a nearby graveyard and hid himself near a

tomb, allowing spooky thoughts to overwhelm the first love tragedy. 'So childish, no?' he says. 'Those days I believed that if I scared myself thoroughly, I'd forget my grief.' The tomb was dark and grim. Insects crawled beneath his feet and bats flew close by. Finally, Shekhar fled in terror.

In his last school year, Shekhar suddenly grew up. Shyness turned to aggression and he became a *dada*. 'All I did was lead gangs in fighting, chasing girls, and burn tents in naval camps.' At night, his exit from home was through a pipeline. One day his father realised Shekhar was missing, and followed the trail straight to their *adda*. He found the gang sprawled all over the place, each one with a girl. Shekhar was pulled out from under the bed and taken back straight to the study table.

'But I didn't study. Not that I didn't like it. I was actually pretty good at it. I just refused to work hard. I had an American girlfriend who came to study with me, and of course, things began getting a bit out of hand. Suddenly, I heard my father coming up the stairs. I pushed her out on the terrace scantily dressed and hoping that my father planned a short visit. But he had a long cosy chat in mind, and before long, my American friend unable to take the cold outside, walked in shivering. It was winter. I hardly need to say what followed.'

It was studies that took him to London again, and London made Shekhar Kapur an individual who knew what he wanted. A career in films. Studying Chartered Accountancy in London was drab. Everything else was fun. 'I earned only nine pounds a week. Two pounds went for breakfast, six in transport and I had to manage everything else in one pound. Still, it was fun. I lived in a hostel with a lot of other young people. I learnt an important lesson there: The only values that exist are the ones you make yourself.'

Meanwhile, Uncle Dev Anand was making *Ishq Ishq Ishq* and had a small role for his nephew. It was just Dev*saab*'s gesture towards his own blood, but Shekhar jumped at it. The film fared poorly, and Shekhar gained nothing but a few lines of anticipatory publicity in the press. But he met Shabana, and that was a big thing. Also, he found the life he had been looking for — films. 'I realised that Shabana's hairdresser

was earning more than I would as a Chartered Accountant. The decision was clear.'

Goldie Anand gave Shekhar his second film — second lead in *Jaan Hazir Hai*. Shekhar gained little. The focus of the film was on Prem Kishen, the other hero, whose role was bigger and more glamorous. The movie was dubbed a flop. 'But it wasn't, you know,' argues Shekhar. 'It ran for 75 weeks in morning shows. Does anyone consider *Dulhan Wohi Jo Piya Man Bhaye* a flop? Yet that's only shown in matinee shows.' Many critics pointed out flaws in Shekhar's voice. 'There's nothing wrong with my voice,' he says. 'In *Jaan Hazir Hai* it seemed to crack at times, but I was experimenting. It didn't work.'

Shekhar moved to another non-film *Pal Do Pal Ka Saath*, by B. R. Ishara. 'Usually his films are good breaking grounds for newcomers, but this one was too offbeat, and didn't go down well. I liked his characterisations though. I had some very powerful moments, but the total film had many loose ends.'

Then came the turning point, *Toote Khilone*, in which he stars with Shabana Azmi. The preview raved about it and the film was applauded. Producers have now started approaching Shekhar with offers. 'But I'm waiting,' says Shekhar. 'I cannot afford more mistakes. The next film must show my individuality. I'll never last in roles I take for the heck of it.'

A Philippine producer who saw the rushes of *Toote Khilone* was impressed by Shekhar. He offered him a part in a Philippine film starring Indians and foreigners. From a small fat boy who wet his trousers, Shekhar Kapur has come a long way. He's now shooting abroad. At home, he's being described as the Shashi Kapoor of the future.

He's still a happy-go-lucky soul. 'I loathe dressing up,' he says. 'My mother and Shabana needle me, otherwise I'd never bother about my wardrobe. I don't care if my socks are dirty, my shirts unironed, and my jeans torn. So what? I don't even possess a hairbrush. I just run my fingers through it really. And now I've eliminated all problems by cutting it really short.'

Once his parents wondered what would become of him.

Today, Shekhar is more than a glamorous shadow of someone else.

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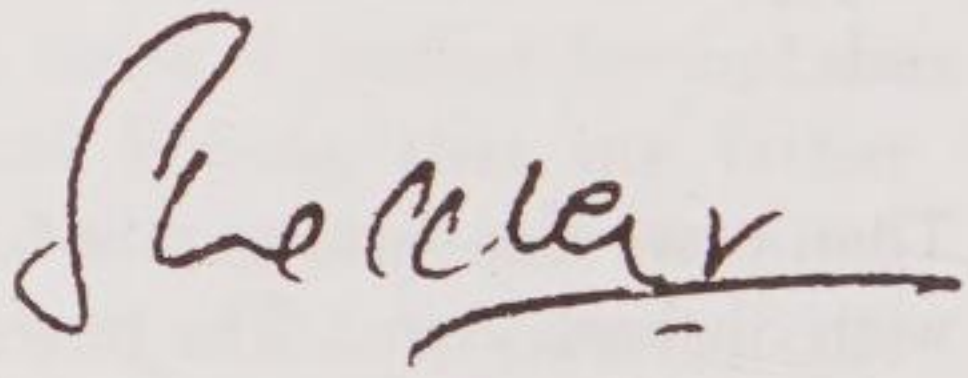
'It's really strange how in retrospect one's interviews are strongly aimed at certain people that you are most concerned about at that time. My answers at that time were obviously aimed at my parents! I was under great pressure to go back to being a Chartered Accountant/Management Consultant in London. I had struggled around. (actually that's a lie I was just having a great time!) for four years in Bombay getting nowhere. I had tried convincing my parents that life as a CA in England was worse than a hairdresser in the Bombay film industry. They didn't believe me. All I was interested in was having a good time — lazing around on the beach, travelling, partying, discovering life. If that is struggling — well, give me back those days any time!'



(Shekhar Kapur)

1979

NEETU SINGH

Neetu had reported for shooting without her usual escorts. Her mother and cousin Bilu had dropped her at the studio and then gone off on some important work. Later during the day they came to the studio but seemed engrossed in a profound discussion. Bilu was carrying a Kala Niketan bag which he swung carelessly from one hand to the other. 'What's in the bag?' I asked casually. 'Should I show her?' Bilu asked the older woman enigmatically. Carefully, Bilu opened the bag and to my amazement took out a beautiful velvet box. He pressed the catch and it sprung open. An exclusive navaratan *necklace flashed fire as sunlight struck it. It was such an exquisite, costly piece, that I let out a gasp.*

'It's an antique,' explained Mrs. Singh with pride. 'But unfortunately Neetu does not like the earrings. Now I'll have to hunt for another pair of earrings to go with it.'

So this was the important mission they were returning from! The important secret mission (the precious shopping artfully concealed in an ordinary plastic bag). Mama Singh and Bilu had been buying jewellery. Obviously for a bride!

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For over a year now, the industry has been buzzing about Neetu's marriage. But in the last few months, the signs have been more definite. A couple of weeks ago, a top director, who also happens to be one of Neetu's favourite directors offered her the lead role opposite Amitabh Bachchan in a love story. It was a role specially written for Neetu, but she refused the offer. An inside source confides that the reason she turned down the role was because she was getting engaged to Rishi Kapoor in July '79.

Neetu, as always, refuses to reveal her future plans. She insists that she isn't signing any films now because she is overworked and has no dates. Incidentally, Jaya Bhaduri too fooled everyone with the very same line, until one fine day the industry woke up and found she had married Amitabh Bachchan! Now, Neetu's displaying the same symptoms — the sudden non-committal statements to the Press, the sudden full stop to photo sessions, the sudden loss of interest in her work, and the feverish desire to complete her films as

fast as possible. Suddenly, the most balanced actress in the industry is displaying signs of pre-bridal nerves. She's both excited and tense at the same time. There's an indefinable anxiety and restlessness about her. She is wildly gay one moment, terribly depressed the next. Never, in all these years that I have known her have I seen Neetu throw tantrums or lose her temper. But this is a different person altogether. She gets irritated with her make-up man, with her hairdresser, with her maid. She's irritated because her breakfast is not ready, irritated because the telephone is not working, irritated because she has to reach the sets on time for shooting. Luckily for her, she won't have to bear these irritations for long. Neetu Singh will soon be dropping out of the ratrace. She will soon be beginning a happier, more tranquil, ordinary life. And meanwhile, she is hurrying, hurrying, hurrying as fast as she can, to get through....

8.30 a.m.: The Singh household is unusually tranquil. An old *ayah* opens the door for me and makes signs to indicate that Neetu is fast asleep. I steal upto her bedroom and find her cuddled beneath her favourite old quilt. She tosses and turns restlessly and the entire bed shakes with her weight. Her mother whispers that no one at home dares to sleep with Neetu because she's such a great one for kicking, everyone else always winds up on the floor. Suddenly, Neetu rolls over, groans, opens one eye and yawns widely. She sits bolt upright in her bed. She is wearing a white nightie with delicate lace on it. She has 10 nighties and wears a fresh one every night. She complains she has hardly slept. 'There are two things I desire intensely and can't get. I'd love to have eight hours of good, undisturbed sleep. And how I long for a nice oil massage without having to bother about washing my hair for shooting!'

9.00 a.m.: The servant brings in a tray with half-a-glass of tea on it, a silver spoon and a silver sugar bowl. Neetu is probably the only actress who takes three and a half spoons of sugar in her half cup of tea. 'I like my tea very sweet,' she says plugging in her bedroom telephone, which has been disconnected to allow her an undisturbed sleep and switches on the radio. '*Chand Churake...*' is playing on Vividh Bharti. Neetu hums it gaily. There is a buzz. Her face lights up. She is expecting a trunk call from Srinagar where Chintu is shooting. Radiantly she picks up the receiver. Alas! It's only

one of the endless seekers of an appointments. She pretends to be the servant. '*Memsaab gharpe nahin hai*,' she whines and slams the receiver down. 'I'm fed up!' she screams and charges to the bathroom.

9.45 a.m.: Neetu spends a whole 25 minutes there. After Ashok Kumar she has the most luxurious bathroom in the film firmament. There are arrangements for everything she might need — from a footstool and basin for her pedicure, to a rack full of Archie comics. There is even a huge colour blow-up of Rishi Kapoor on the wall exactly opposite the potty, and a mini refrigerator stuffed with foreign chocolates! While she's in the bath, her personal maid, Munni, comes in and tidies the bedroom. She draws the curtains, makes the bed, and finally picks up the tea tray and disappears. I look around the beautiful room done up in different shades of green. A sliding door separates Neetu's bedroom from her dressing room. Mama Singh has had a special staircase built, so that Neetu's staff can go directly to the dressing room without having to trespass on Neetu's privacy. Already, I can hear faint noises in the adjoining room. Mosa, her timid make-up man, is getting ready for the day. He sets out her things on the make-up table—the icebox, a napkin, some small bits of white linen, the pancake, i.e., make-up. He sharpens the eyebrow pencils, cleans the mirror, opens the bottle of eyeliner and the blush-on cases.

10 a.m.: Neetu comes out looking fresh, her wet hair bundled up in a green towel. While chanting her prayers she doesn't believe in long monologues. Her conversation with God is brief and to the point. She lights the lamp, changes the flowers and says a silent prayer.

10.30 a.m.: Already there's a sizeable group waiting to see Neetu. Two men announce that they have come to polish the furniture. Neetu packs them off to her mother. Her dress designer, Leena Ben and her tailor Mohan Bhai, are next. They have come for half-a-dozen dress trials. Hurriedly, she tries on one outfit after another, hardly bothering that some of the colour combinations are awful and some of the clothes don't quite fit. Leena Ben rattles off the list, telling Neetu which dress is for which film and which scene. Neetu is hardly listening. 'Okay. Okay. Okay. Everything will do.'

10.45 a.m.: Her breakfast is brought into the make-up room

because Neetu doesn't have time to do both, eat and do her make-up. So while Mosa puts on the base, she swallows a fried egg and a thinly buttered slice of toast. Then she begins painting her eyes, pausing in between, to take alternate sips of orange juice and milk. I catch her reflection in the mirror and she smiles a little awkwardly. 'I'm going crazy. I don't know what I am doing I am putting blush on my lashes! (Sighs). In any case I am not bothered. But it is shameful the way I get late for shootings. No matter how hard I try I cannot reach the sets before 10.30 a.m.' Her mother enters and breaks the sad news of director Kundan Kumar's death. Neetu is shocked. 'We go through so much in life.. only to arrive at this particular day. Only death is definite. Everything else is fate.'

11 a.m.: The house which was quiet and peaceful only two hours ago, is a madhouse now. If it's not the doorbell ringing, it's the phone. The unit men call up to find out if Neetu has left? 'Tell them I'm just leaving,' she whispers to her hairdresser and sticks her tongue out naughtily. The servants are all running about getting Neetu's things and screaming at one another to hurry up and take them down to the car. One of them carries down her makeup tray. Another her vanity case and the icebox. Her hairdresser Shirley carries a picnic basket, filled with salad, a bowl of curds, a selection of fruits and some magazines. The lift is kept waiting for Neetu, and Shirley keeps pacing from the lift to the door telling Neetu to hurry up. Finally, Neetu rushes in screaming to the liftman to take them down FAST. *'Jaldi, jaldi, jaldi!'* In the basement Neetu is told that the car is missing. Her chauffeur has gone to fill petrol. There is a chorus of groans and sighs from everyone. Except Neetu. She quietly walks to the gateman's chair and flops into it. Her expression is one of total boredom!

11.15 a.m.: As the car reaches the location at Juhu, Neetu catches sight of the director. 'Oh God!' she says tensely. 'He's in a bad mood. I have to still touch up my face, do my hair, wear my jewellery!' The film is Ravi Tandon's *Khel Tamasha,* and as the car stops, the unit men, the producer, the assistant director, come up, one by one and greet her. She smiles at everyone. A crowd surrounds her and begs for autographs. They ask the same questions. Which film is she shooting for? Which film is going to be released next? Is she going to marry Chintu?

11.45 a.m.: Someone informs Neetu that since she was late, Jeetu decided to visit a friend living close by. Now, his maroon limousine enters. A fan screams, 'Hey Manoj Kumar...' Another fan says, 'Silly, it's not Manoj, it's Jeetendra and the next minute he is swallowed up by his fans. The assistant director comes up and tells the stars that they can start work if they have finished with the autographs. Jeetendra says he's ready. Neetu's feeling too lazy to do up her hair in a difficult style required for the *bhangra* dance.

Besides, there is no make-up room to which she can retire. So she snaps a rubber band round her hair and says. 'I'm ready, too.'

The shot is on the roadside. They have put up a *Laila Majnu* poster because this is a romantic song, where Jeetu carries Neetu on his shoulder and the two of them dance on the streets. The crowd loves the shot. They whistle, crack jokes and pass lewd remarks. There's a lot of pushing and shoving and a small fight develops.

1 p.m.: By now, even the cops on duty have given in and are enjoying the *tamasha.* Each time a familiar face passes in an imported car, the crowd lets out wild screams, 'Dilip Kumar...Feroz Khan...Sanjay Khan!..' There's such rush, I find its safer to sit in the car with Neetu's hairdresser Shirley and her chauffeur Ebrahim. Shirley says, 'No one is like Neetu. She treats me like an equal. If she screams, I scream back. I have seen the other stars. Some of them treat their hairdressers really bad. After working with Neetu, I doubt if I can adjust with anyone else. I will really miss her.' Ebrahim is less sentimental than Shirley. 'Whether Neetu works or quits, Mummy will always have a car. And as long as the car remains. So will I. After working for two days with Jaya, four months with *Kaka*, four months with Hrishida, I have stuck with the Singhs for the last nine years!'

1.30 p.m.: Mrs. Singh arrives in her Fiat. As she joins us, the dismal mood in the car lifts, and everyone stirs with pleasure. She says *Aatish* is a very big hit, but hits and flops don't matter, not any more. As they crack jokes and set everyone laughing, I look at this confidence, charming lady in the expensive sari and I wonder why people call her a

tigress. She isn't. She is a woman bruised by life, who does not want her daughter to ever experience the same blows. From a distance, we watch Neetu walking towards the car followed by crowds of fans. Her make-up man opens a fancy yellow umbrella and escorts her to the car. The fans continue to wave and blow kisses until we are out of sight.

2.15 p.m.: The entire unit of *Khel Tamasha* has moved to the Sun 'n' Sand Hotel. Neetu books an urgent call to Srinagar and moves all through lunch. Jeetendra says, 'Until now, Neetu was raw. Now, just when she's becoming a mature actress, she wants to quit. She's just not interested. She's only interested in HIM and his telephones. But mind you, he's worse. As soon as he enters a room, even before he puts down his luggage, he rushes to the phone and says, 'Operator, Neetu Singh, PP Please.' Everyone laughs. Neetu blushes. 'I wonder what life would have been without him... What work would have meant if I had not met him,' she muses.

2.30 p.m.: She's all alone. Her maid, hairdresser, make-up man, mother and the countless escorts are still in the dining hall enjoying a fattening meal. This is a flash of reality. For Neetu is forever lonely — lonely in solitude, lonely in crowds. Normally, she wears a vivacious, bubbly mask. But occasionally it slips, as it does now. 'I love to be alone,' she says softly. 'All by myself. When I get back from work, I literally lock myself up in my bedroom. I refuse to meet or speak to anybody. I just pick up something to read and relax'.

3.20 p.m.: The shot is by the poolside. The junior artistes have been waiting in their swimming costumes for over an hour. Neetu stops by one of the girls and speaks in whispers. She comes back and says,'I like these junior artistes. They have depth and they are honest people.' Her eyes are pensive. The producer beckons her for the shot and as she walks to the set he acts overfriendly by holding her arm. She shrinks instantly. Quickly her expression changes and she makes no attempt to hide her disapproval. Her disinterest in work is getting more and more apparent. She's forgotten to bring her sunglasses. A visiting friend offers her own — they are garish and don't suit the costume but Neetu does not care. 'Never mind. It's only one shot, besides who is interested in what I'm wearing?'.

4.20 p.m.: It's pack-up time and we are saying bye to Ravi Tandon, one of the most charming directors in filmdom. He says he had one superhit, *Khel Khel Mein* with Neetu. Now there's going to be two more releases - *Jootha Kahin Ka* and *Khel Tamasha*. He's keeping his fingers crossed that they too will be hits. Neetu excuses herself and marches to the reception desk. This is her final try for the Srinagar line. She's out of luck. The operator cannot get through.

4.30 p.m.: We are at a private bungalow in Vile Parle shooting for *Ganga Meri Ma* with Nirupa Roy and Iftekhar. Neetu has excellent vibes with everyone. She addresses Nirupa Roy as aunty. 'When I was a child I used to stay at her house during all my holidays. Her son, Yogesh and I were great chums. We would play *gilli danda*, cricket and snakes and ladders. Everything I did, he wanted to do too. All his sentences used to begin with 'Even I...' Not anymore. 'Today, when we meet we are awfully embarrassed. We hardly talk.' As for Iftekhar, Neetu just refuses to address him as Uncle. She insists they belong to the same generation. 'It's just that unlike my mummy, his mother forgot to oil his hair. That's why he has a few grey strands.' He calls her Neetu. She calls him Ifti.

6.15 p.m.: Mrs. Singh and Shirley are going home. They have an important appointment. However Neetu's not alone. She has a friend for company, a chirpy, vivacious girl from London who doesn't stop talking even for a minute. The scene calls for a change of costume. Neetu puts on a pair jeans, a yellow shirt, and a denim jacket. There's a ghastly silver chain laid out with the costume. Neetu holds it up, grimaces 'Eeks! It's so ugly, and puts it on. Now that she's ready, she flops on the bed and lets the chatter pass over her head. Suddenly she jumps up, starts throwing pillows around, sings a film song and does a John Travolta. As suddenly as she started, she stops lets out a deep sigh and collapses on the bed. She looks careworn, hurt. 'When Chintu is not in town, I feel very depressed,' she says painfully. 'I don't mind even if I have to work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. But I can't bear it if anything goes wrong between us. I must hear his voice. I must be in contact with him. If I can't, it puts me off completely...' As she speaks, an unguarded tear trickles down her cheek. There's so much laughter and chatter in the room. I doubt if anyone has noticed what has just happened.

6.40 p.m.: The assistant knocks on the door and says, 'Madam, shot is ready.' 'Yes Mister,' she teases the boy, 'Even Madam is ready. I play a thief in this film,' she informs me as she gets up to go. 'I can't remember in how many films I'm playing a thief. I do the same things, say the same lines and sing the same songs. It's repetition, repetition, repetition.' The director explains the shot. Neetu does what she is told. No arguments, no opinions. It's been like that all day.

8 p.m.: It's break time, and a plate of snacks arrives. The moment she sees the *bhajiyas* and bread she realises she's starving. '*Jaldi...jaldi...idhar do.*' I pity the boy. He is so embarrassed by her non-starry behaviour that he forgets to close his mouth and stands there gaping as she wolfs down the *bhajiyas*. She hasn't had a morsel since lunch when she nibbled at two baked crabs and took a bite from Jeetu's home cooked food. After that it has been just work... work. She's not even had a cup of tea! When the dialogue writer comes, she grabs the paper from him and within five minutes has mugged up her lines. 'Quick. Quick. Quick! Make it snappy. I want to pack-up by 8.30 p.m. I want to go home...'

9 p.m.: At last, it's pack-up-time. At last, she can leave. Her paraphernalia is put in the dicky. The chauffeur is already at the wheel. The make-up man and the rest of the clan have also taken their seats. Neetu runs down the staircase screaming a universal bye to everyone. The hostess of the bungalow is waiting at the door. Neetu stops for a polite word. It's funny how she carries on with the formalities right up to the end of the day. When she gets in the car, she seems delirious with joy. Like a little boy let off from school. At the gates of the bungalow, there is a large group of people. They have been waiting patiently for the past four hours, just for a glimpse of Neetu Singh. 'They're crazy,' says Neetu removing the pins from her hair.

'That's what you feel now but you'll miss them once you are away from the arc lights, I say. 'Not at all,' she says vehemently, 'Do you think it's my life's ambition to be successful? To be a No.1 star? Do you think it makes me ecstatic to see those people waiting for me? Do you think it boosts my ego to have fans asking for autographs? Films and fans are not of paramount importance to me. I will never

miss them. I know my needs. God! I'm so fed-up of work work, work. When am I going to be totally free? Then I will do all that I cannot do now — Sleep, laze, put oil in my hair, look after my home. I'll do some courses and probably even study. I was never a dull student. I used to stand first in my class. I'll start playing the *sitar* again. These days I have given it up completely. But there are two things I will never do... No matter how bored I am. I will never play cards. And I will never put on weight. Look, I've managed to come to this size after almost starving. I can't be negligent now!' She thinks some more about the future and a small smile curves her lips. 'I will walk on the streets. Wow! It sounds beautiful. I was told that Jaya Bachchan goes to buy vegetables. Doesn't that sound exciting? REALLY exciting?? Oof! When will I be absolutely free...??'

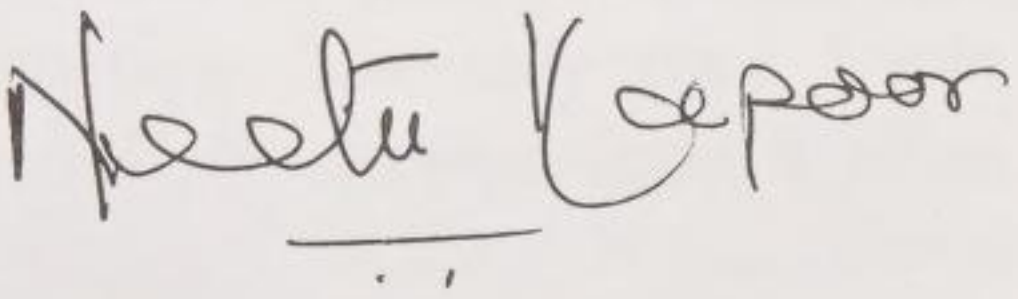
9.15 p.m.: Home. We go up to the flat in silence. Everyone is tired and depressed. It seems we've been working much longer than the whole world. Even the liftman has gone off duty and there is a different boy than the one in the morning. The door opens and her dog, Tanya, comes rushing up to Neetu. She gathers the puppy into her arms, cuddles and kisses her and carries her straight to her room. Her sandals go flying in one corner, her jacket in another. Just then her personal line rings. The Srinagar call has come through. At last! I try not to listen as Neetu cradles the receiver and whispers into it for nine minutes. But I can't help hearing a few snatches. 'Don't smoke too much...I'm missing you. Baba... look after yourself.' When she disconnects, she is feeling on top of the world!

She stands on the bed and screams with joy. Her fatigue has disappeared and her eyes are glowing. She hunts for a nightie and flies to the bathroom, returning in 10 minutes looking like a daisy. Her expression is a mixture of emotions when she says, 'It takes me 55 minutes to put on my make-up and only five to take it off !'

And that in a nutshell, is it. It's taken Neetu five years of struggle and hardship to achieve her present success. Five years, wiped out in an instant by her decision to quit films!

❀❀

'It was like reliving the past. I cannot identify with that pace anymore. I don't know how I worked round-the-clock. Today, the mere thought of going out of the house makes me anxious. I don't know how I did it for so many years. So often, when I see my husband leave for shooting early morning, I feel relieved that I'm a lady of leisure. Not that it is always peaceful at home because domesticity has its own responsibilities — schedules of husband and children, domestic staff. But there's a joy in serving those you love. I've matured and am more in control of my life than I was earlier. I was quite childish then, but it's okay because times were different then.'



(Neetu Singh-Kapoor)

1979

SHASHI KAPOOR

In the wake of his new release Junoon, ***Shashi Kapoor clears allegations and expresses what he feels about being a producer.***

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Is it true that you've resented being in Raj Kapoor's shadow. So when Raj failed to get Nafisa Ali for Bobby, ***you decided to be one up on him by getting her for*** Junoon. ***The story that Kunal spotted her at a swimming pool and sent her picture to Shyam Benegal is an eyewash.***

According to your rumour I first decided on Nafisa Ali and then thought of *Junoon.*! Not true at all. As a matter of fact, Nafisa's role was the last one to be cast. The girl who was originally to play the part decided to walk out of the film only two days before the shooting. The only time I met Nafisa before *Junoon* was about a year-and-a-half back when she was visiting Chintu at Rajkamal Studios. It was Kunal who told Nafisa about *Junoon*, but whether it was at the swimming pool, dining table or the beach, I don't know (sarcastic). By the way, Raj Kapoor never offered Nafisa *Bobby.* And just to set the record straight, I've never felt the need to be one-up on my brother.

The Kapoor khandaan ***has all along maintained that women in their family don't work in films. So is it true that the rest of the family is upset now, because Jennifer is doing*** Junoon?

There's no such Kapoor tradition—Geeta Bali acted, didn't she? I know Babita didn't, but then a heroine's career has always been short lived compared to a hero's. If tomorrow Sanjna wants to work in films, she is free to do so. I never stopped Jennifer from doing *Bombay Talkies*, and I certainly didn't stop her from doing *Junoon*. I'm not ashamed of working in films and neither are my brothers. On the contrary, both Raj and Shammi have always said that Jennifer is a marvellous artiste. If she does not act in more films, it's not because I don't let her, but because there haven't been many opportunities.

The rest of the Kapoors seem to be envious of your recent success. Randhir's been heard saying things like 'Shashi Kapoor went to Shyam Benegal and not vice versa'.

Why should the Kapoors envy me? What great things have I achieved? I believe in one kind of world. Raj Kapoor, Rishi

and Dabboo believe in a different kind of film world. Period. Dabboo is absolutely right in stating that I went to Shyam Benegal and not vice versa. I asked Shyam for a subject. I also asked M. S. Sathyu and Basu Chatterji. I've even asked Satyajit Ray. In 1970, we were planning to make a film in English. Unfortunately, it didn't work out.

Shyam Benegal usually completes a film in 40 days. Is it true that* Junoon *and Shyam's other projects were held up because you were busy with outside films?

Shyam Benegal has never had to wait for me. I finished my work in exactly five weeks. I worked for three schedules. First, at Lucknow for three weeks and after that in Jaipur for two weeks. Whoever told you that Shyam completes his films in 40 days? He usually takes 10 weeks. This film took 11 weeks, but then there is a world of difference between a film like *Manthan* and *Junoon. Junoon* is a much, much bigger film.Whatever delay there was, was due to circumstances beyond our control. Initially, the film was to start in April but it was postponed to September, because the script was not ready. From September it was postponed to October because we hadn't finished casting. Next, we decide to start in December but I fell ill. I was down with jaundice. Finally, we started shooting on the 1st of February and finished on the 10th of April, minus the war scenes.

Is it true that you included Shabana in the film as a personal condition? Was Smita Patil at any time considered for the same role?

It was always Shabana. Smita Patil wasn't even considered for the role. But at no stage did I approach her directly. Shyam went to her with the story and she agreed instantly. I confess I was a bit apprehensive about Shabana saying yes to the film. Unlike both *Ankur* and *Nishant, Junoon* does not revolve around her chartacter. I'm glad she has no hang-ups about the length of her role. I respect her for that. Let's hope she stays that way.

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Film makers complain that now that you're a producer yourself, you think you can advise them on how to make their films?

I give them advice? (irritated). Do I have the time? (laughs sarcastically). And who would listen to me? I am not a Vinod Khanna, Sanjeev Kumar or Dilip Kumar. I have never said a single word to a single producer of mine. If you don't

believe me you can cross-check with my co-stars who are forever nagging me because I'm so cool about everything. I didn't even interfere in *Junoon!* A couple of times I told the cameraman, 'Govind*ji* (Nihalani) I don't think the lighting is okay. There's a shadow on my nose. Both the times, he told me I was wrong and that the lighting was perfectly okay. After that I kept my mouth shut. I'll open it again only when I'm both the producer as well as director.

In your hurry to complete Junoon, ***you went back on your word and refused to give Manoj Kumar dates. Wasn't that the reason why you were dropped from*** Kranti?

I'm fed up of explaining this controversy to the Press. And I wish to clear the whole incident once and for all. To start with, I was offered the role immediately after the release of *Roti Kapda Aur Makan*. Manoj said he could not give me much to do in *Roti Kapda Aur Makan* but he would write me a beautiful role in *Kranti*. Next, I heard that *Kranti* had been dropped and *Naya Bharat* was in. After that there was this overpublicised squabble between Rajesh Khanna and Salim-Javed, and once again plans were switched. *Naya Bharat* was dropped and *Kranti* was in. I remember distinctly that I was shooting for *Apna Khoon* when Manoj Kumar came to see me. He told me he was planning to start the film in October. I explained that October was absolutely impossible. I was delaying my own films because I had no dates — so from where would I give him dates for *Kranti?* Finally, we decided to start shooting in July. Meanwhile, while I was in Lucknow some troublemongers who disliked me had me removed from the film. In my place they brought in a person whom they considered as 'Number One' (sarcastic). When I came back, I heard from the stuntmen about the change. I was shocked. Here was a film which had been especially promised to me, but I had been replaced and nobody had even the decency to come and inform me about it! One Sunday, a month later, my man came and knocked on the door. He said that Manoj Kumar was waiting down in his car. He didn't want to come up because he was too ashamed to face me! My first reaction was, 'To hell with everyone! I'm not going down.' But on second thoughts I decided to meet Manoj. He apologised for his behaviour. He said he had been listening to the wrong people. The past was forgotten and I was back in *Kranti.*

The expectations are very high from Junoon. ***Wouldn't it have been safer to plunge into a commercial film especially as this is your first film as producer?***

Objection please. *Junoon* is not an art film. It's a purely commercial film, handled by a good director. I don't believe in art films that don't run. I don't believe in arty directors who cry that the audiences are not ready for them. My logic tells me that if a film fails, there's something wrong with the film, not with the audience. Why otherwise would Shyam Benegal's films run and Mani Kaul's or Kumar Sahani's don't. It's probably because something is missing somewhere. The reason people were disappointed with *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* was because its neither a feature film nor a documentary. *Junoon*, I repeat is purely commercial. I believe in well-made films. Films which do good business. Films which the public will accept. And films which have a meaning.

You had problems selling Junoon ***because the distributors were worried that they had have another*** Shatranj.... ***on their hands.***

No, I have had no problems selling the film because I have been practical enough not to commit the mistake I made with *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*. First of all, I haven't over priced it for India. And second, I will deal with the overseas distributors in such a way that ultimately I can recover my budget.

It's said that you lost a lot of money on Satyam Shivam Sundaram ***and are now you're trying everything — an award winning director Shyam Benegal, new face Nafisa Ali, and careful doses of pre-publicity — to ensure that*** Junoon ***will be a success.***

Whoever told you that *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* is a flop? It is not. There is an overflow in every territory. It is a flop only in relation to the expectations from the film. People had expected it to be as big a hit as *Sholay* and *Bobby*. If *Junoon* does become a hit, I will go mad... I don't care who takes the credit for it — Shyam, Nafisa, Jennifer, Shabana, Naseer, Benjamin, Deepti. If you want, you can take the credit for writing this article. I don't care as long as I collect the money.

Is it true that you're trying to fix up Kunal, as an assistant to Shyam Benegal.

Kunal has just finished his education. In our family, we don't believe in pushing people. We believe in paying for their education and after that, giving them a kick on the rear.

When you were a nobody you were a favourite with the press. Now that you're somebody you don't seem to have time for them.

Look, I've never entertained the press for personal benefits. I've never paid journalists for good write-ups, nor do I keep press agents. I've realised that press cannot make a good film flop or a bad film run. Didn't the press say that *SSS* was a flop? It's a hit! Earlier, 'Trade Guide' claimed *Sholay* was a loser — it turned out to be a runaway hit. Do I need the press? I'm not at war with the scribe, but let me put it this way. The press is like a pretty woman. Friendship or enmity with her can spell danger. The safest is to keep her at a distance. *Na to inse dosti achchi, na dushmani.*

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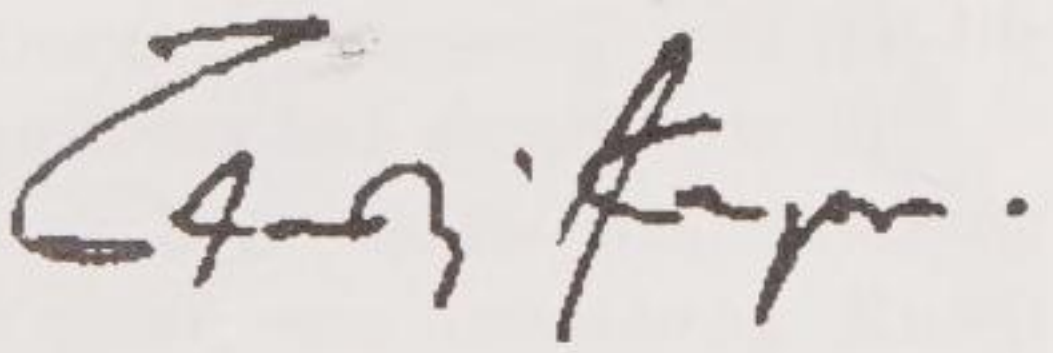
'It all seems so trivial today, but it was important at that time... The slighest misinterpretation mattered, made one angry. I guess that's what controversies are all about. Outrageous while they last and forgotten when time passes by.'



(Shashi Kapoor)

The 80's was the decade of multistarrers and double-shifts.

- ❀ Zeenat Aman was a leading star running second to Hema Malini at the box-office. Dismissed as a hard core professional, I discovered Zeenat to be an exceedingly shy person.
- ❀ Writer director Gulzar was unanimously popular with his heroines and unpopular with the heroes. My exhaustive interview with the writer-film-maker, revealed more wounds than he'd care to admit.
- ❀ Danny Denzongpa had time and again said that he'd rather give up than compromise. He refused films that entailed shooting during summers, for he said he was a man from the hills and could not bear the heat.
- ❀ Actresses Sridevi and Jaya Prada had arrived from the South and were trying to adjust to the razzle-dazzle of Mumbai film industry. Jaya Prada described it as the city that never sleeps and Sridevi was confused why everyone addressed each other with *ji* ?
- ❀ Dev Anand was launching new films and new faces. He refused to talk about the past, his explanation being that why dwell on the past when the present is so stimulating? Sanjay Dutt, despite his debut release *Rocky* was recognised as Nargis and Sunil Dutt's son and Shabana Azmi, the fiery actress of parallel cinema was showing the first sign of a blooming activist. I attended two extensive outdoors. Director Gautam Ghose's *Paar* in Calcutta and watched Shabana and Naseer swim a river with a herd of pigs. And Shyam Benegal's *Mandi* in Hyderabad and witnessed a bunch of actresses transforming into reel-life prostitutes with gawdy costumes and garish make-up.
- ❀ It was the era of star-sons. Dharmendra was launching Sunny Deol. Manoj Kumar was launching Kunal Goswami. Raj Kapoor was launching Rajiv Kapoor and Subhash Ghai, Jackie Shroff. Only Anil Kapoor had no Godfather and that is why he was hell-bent on succeeding. Other new girls making a debut besides Poonam Dhillon and Meenakshi Seshadri, were Rati Agnihotri and Anita Raaj. They spoke with startling honesty about bed, bath and breakfast. They expressed anxiety and accepted conflict. They swore that success wouldn't change them, but admitted that corruption lay in the touch of stardom!
- ❀ It was the time Rekha wasn't talking to the press. Most of the write-ups on her during this phase were desk pieces.

My profile on her was based on my observations over the years. The assessment hurt her. She felt it wasn't fair without giving her side of the story. Dimple Kapadia, on the other hand, was relieved that she didn't have to participate on my feature recounting memories of her.

- Shabana Azmi had emerged the champion of women issues after Mahesh Bhatt's *Arth.* Her feminist fans felt let down when the actress married Javed Akhtar, an already married man, until Azmi explained, without accusing anyone, why her case was different. Amitabh Bachchan had joined politics and temporarily quit films. In his absence, Mithun Chakraborty, who was consistently giving hits at the box-office, was being speculated as the next super hero. Going through a turbulent phase, Mithun could only talk of betrayals and heartbreaks in his interview. Unusually depressed, he was heading for a nervous breakdown and he knew it.
- Film-maker Aruna Raje, came close to a nervous breakdown after the untimely demise of her 12-year old-daughter Gargi. During an interview conducted with her and ex-husband Vikas Desai earlier during the year, I was oblivious to the cracks in their marriage.
- Rajesh Khanna had come to terms with his box-office faring and was looking for solace in love rather than success. In a coup interview, I made the three women he loved and lost, Anju Mahendru, Dimple Kapadia and Tina Munim analyse the complexed man. I expected Khanna to be angry with me for that, but unpredictable that he is, he was flattered.
- Jackie Shroff's family and staff discussed the pain and the passion of knowing the actor intimately. His housemaid Vimla broke down while narrating a particularly thoughtful gesture of her master.

1980

SHABANA AZMI

Shabana has changed. From the emotional actress who flew off the handle at the slightest provocation, Shabana Azmi has mellowed down. She has become more serene, more reflective, even if in the bargain a more threatening personality. Gone is the champagne bottle that burst and went all bubbles... Quite like the old wine bottle, whose cork has to be drawn almost reverentially, the bouquet being stronger for the content being older and wiser! There are shades of the earlier challenges, but Shabana remains uncomplainingly civil. Eight months ago, had I approached her with the same questionnaire, she would have screamed at her highest pitch and ultimately, got a headache she could not handle. Today, she looks at my charge sheet unruffled. After a quick glance, she returns my paper and asks me in a tone that is too sincere to be ignored, 'Do you really believe in these allegations or is it just work?' Her sarcasm is not premeditated. Her feeling persecuted is justified. The controversies have reached a climax. The wine weathered just right, the reactions come after the first few sips of sluggishly moving liqueur.

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Despite your gregarious behaviour and the enormous self-confidence that you exude, people very close to you reveal that you are a terribly insecure person and need someone to lean on emotionally all the time.

Yes, I'm a vulnerable human being, and I prefer to remain so in spite of getting hurt time and again. I want to lean on somebody, I want to depend. Of course, I can be strong, but I don't want to be, because it will make me smug and self-sufficient and deprive me of the very experience of living. Once I go on that trip, there will be no coming back. Anybody who leans on other human beings for emotional support is bound to be insecure. For he or she is always in danger of losing the other person's love.

Is it true that you are going through a phase of grave emotional crisis and to gather some peace of mind, you've joined the EST course? Do you have to seek such a publicity stunt as refuge?

I was not seeking emotional support through EST — that I get from my friends in plenty. As an actress, I feel I get cut off from several experiences in life that are more accessible to

people who are not celebrities. I wanted to experience the imposition of a new discipline on me. It would be nice if I could say that I did the EST training out of sheer curiosity. But obviously there is more to it than just that. It's insulting to call my doing the course, a publicity stunt. I came away from the course, feeling very happy. The course has helped me very unobtrusively to become a more complete and wholesome person.

You're superior about your home atmosphere. You go on and on about the art and culture mehfils ***hosted by your parents. Those who come into contact with you say that friends are people you merely want to be proud of. Not people who matter. Is the need to be surrounded by only creative and talented people deliberate?***

My friends have remained the same right from my schooldays. Of course, there have been additions. Some of them are creative people, others plain housewives, mothers of bonny children. I'm very proud of my parents and would have been so, even if they weren't artistic or celebrities in their own right. I don't fantasize about the atmosphere around me. I've grown up in it. I relate at various levels to various people. I enjoy the company of people who exercise my intelligence and I derive equal satisfaction from gossiping about common friends. I get as concerned about a friend's problem with her in-laws, as I would over a friend's film not being granted a loan from the FFC.

Why do you have this intense weakness for beautiful people? You've confessed that you were partial to attractive people. It is said, reverence for beauty is great when there is beauty lacking within. Do you consider yourself unattractive?

One minute you put me down and call me conceited. The next minute, you make me out to be unattractive. You're contradicting your own statements. Well, of course, I'm partial to good-looking people. This weakness was more intense when I was younger. Also my definition of beauty has changed over the years. On one hand, I find Shashi Kapoor an extremely good-looking man. I want to gasp everytime I see him. On the other hand, I adore Naseeruddin Shah's appearance. He is not conventionally good-looking, but has this intense, strong face. I have a very, very strong aesthetic sense, but surely I can look beyond the superficial. Ultimately, I must relate to the person.

You have a dual personality. There is a side to you which is boastful and intimidating. Whilst the other is warm and compassionate. Is this the reason why people either love you or hate you. People say you're an extremist.

I guess there is some truth in your charge. All of us have two sides. I've become a victim because people approach me with a preconceived notion. They already have an image about me. I'm moody, I agree. If on my very first meeting with a person, he gives me bad vibes, then God forgive him and God forgive me. My feelings tend to dictate my attitude. But I'm not rigid about my opinions. I'm open to change. Next time, if I meet the same person in a different environment, I'm open to striking a rapport. How can you call me an extremist? I have no strong dislikes, only intense likes — I make a great attempt to reach out to people who matter to me. A great expenditure of energy goes in trying to understand them completely. I trust easily. I cannot bear half-baked relationships. I cannot bear people who want to give and will not give, who want to express and will not express. The effort of reaching out to such people is tiring and infuriating. I'd much rather have fulfilling, constructive relationships.

You are condescending and refuse interviews to reporters who don't measure up to your expectations. Even photographers are most of the time hesitant about asking you for a photo session. Do you instil fear for power play?

Since I'm normally accessible to the press, a lot of reporters think it is their birthright to drop in on my sets without an appointment. There are some who indulge in the familiarity of giving surprise visits home. I'm against journalists who take me for granted. At such times, I can be very rude. I admit it. I consider it an insult to my sensibilities to perform what no doubt, they consider my duty — to open out and speak. A lot of trust needs to be generated on both sides before one can really open up and speak. Surely, that trust is built in a particular atmosphere. And it's natural for an actress who is about to share her private moment with the world at large to wait for that right moment.

Is it true that after Lahu Ke Do Rang, ***you've hiked your price? Reports have it that you reject films if they don't pay your price. Then how come, with certain producers, you sign a film for a song?***

I demand what I'm worth. And I've decided that this is my time for a price hike. I must be the only heroine who has such a long list of successful films. In the last six years of my career, only three of my films have flopped. From the very beginning, I've had a separate price for commercial films and a separate price for art films. Money matters, I feel, should be clearly discussed right at the beginning.

Because of Parveen Babi's prolonged illness, producers have begun to drop her from the projects. Are you grabbing this opportunity to replace her? Reportedly, two important producers have approached you with offers.
That's true. And it is also true that I've said 'no' to both these producers. But before you pat me on my back and say what a nice person I am, let me tell you that I consider it no compliment to be replacing Parveen. I realise that this is a tragedy for vast sums of money have been invested, incurring in heavy losses. Unfortunately, I'm not grabbing the offers, for the roles Parveen signed aren't exciting enough.

Secretly, you consider Deepti Naval a threat and this patronizing attitude towards her is a mere facade. Is this your way of guarding your territory because you're terribly insecure after seeing her performance in Ek Baar Phir?
If I'm to become insecure so easily, I will be spending half my time worrying about actresses that already exist, and the remaining time, about those coming in. This means that all my energy and concentration is being wasted in ousting others rather than concentrating on my work. Please, I know exactly where my security lies. I liked Deepti immensely in *Ek Baar Phir* and would like to see her in more important roles. Nobody is a threat to anyone. Each one carves his own image!

What has gone sour between Sharmila Tagore and you? Why have you suddenly started bad-mouthing her? Is it a case of familiarity breeding contempt?
The press had decided independently that, first, I was on a Sharmila trip. Now, they've decided that I'm off her. What I have to say in this matter seems of little importance. I'm tired of the press making decisions for me. You are the first journalist who has at least bothered to ask this. Nothing has gone sour between us, except that I'm no longer in awe of her as I used to be earlier. Though, I still find her fascinating. I'd say it's a more realistic relationship now. I

am glad I've met Rinku now when she is more mellow and accessible to people than she was in her prime. Today, I find her truly interested in people. I have an extremely communicative relationship with her. Fortunately for me, all this imaginatively worked out backbiting hasn't made us self-conscious with each other. If it continues in the same manner, it's bound to make a difference.

Do you think Smita Patil's attraction for Vinod Khanna is an extension of her old hang-up about you? First, she had a brief attraction for Shashi Kapoor and now it's your co-star Vinod Khanna. How do you react to the Smita-Vinod affair?

I'm greatly relieved. I have been shouting from the rooftops that I've got nothing to do with Vinod Khanna, but of course, the press knows better. At least, these rumours will stop and as far as I'm concerned, I'm only bothered about that. About the hang-up, I'm not assuming that. You are presuming it. And if this ridiculous notion is to be believed, I should get more protective about Shekhar Kapur, shouldn't I?

On one hand, you say you're in love with Shekhar Kapur and want to marry him. On the other hand, in spite of being in a position to do so, you do nothing to boost his career. Are you trying to prove yourself a martyr to ethics or are you insecure that if Shekhar Kapur becomes a star, he will ditch you?

That's absolute nonsense! I would be on cloud nine if Shekhar should become a star tomorrow. You cannot imagine how much the mere thought means to me. It's true that while I recommend other friends to people, I refrain from doing so about Shekhar. But they are friends with whom I have no personal involvement. Asking a role for Shekhar is like asking a role for myself. It makes me feel small and petty. How can I be insecure about his success? Today, I'm known as somebody's daughter. Tomorrow, I will be known as somebody's wife. And as a wife, I'm absolutely prepared to back my husband's glory rather than have a separate identity of my own.

What is your relationship with Shashi Kapoor? For the last time, are you in love with him or not?

For the last time, I'm in love with a Kapur. Only, his first name happens to be Shekhar. Shashi Kapoor is one of the

strongest influences in my adult life, I admit. He met me at a point and time when I was very young, very protected. He has been instrumental in transforming me into an adult ready to face a world, where I will not always be protected. I will respect him till my dying day.

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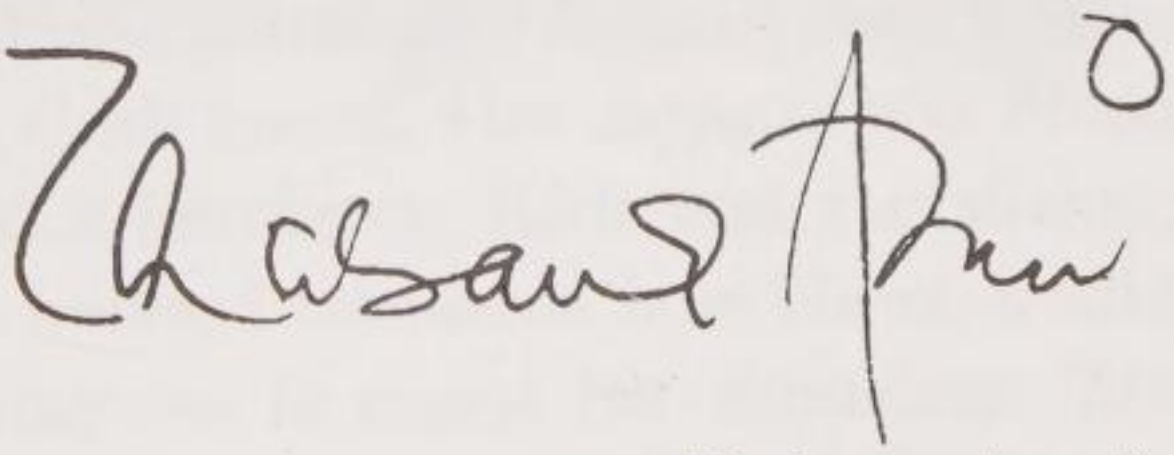
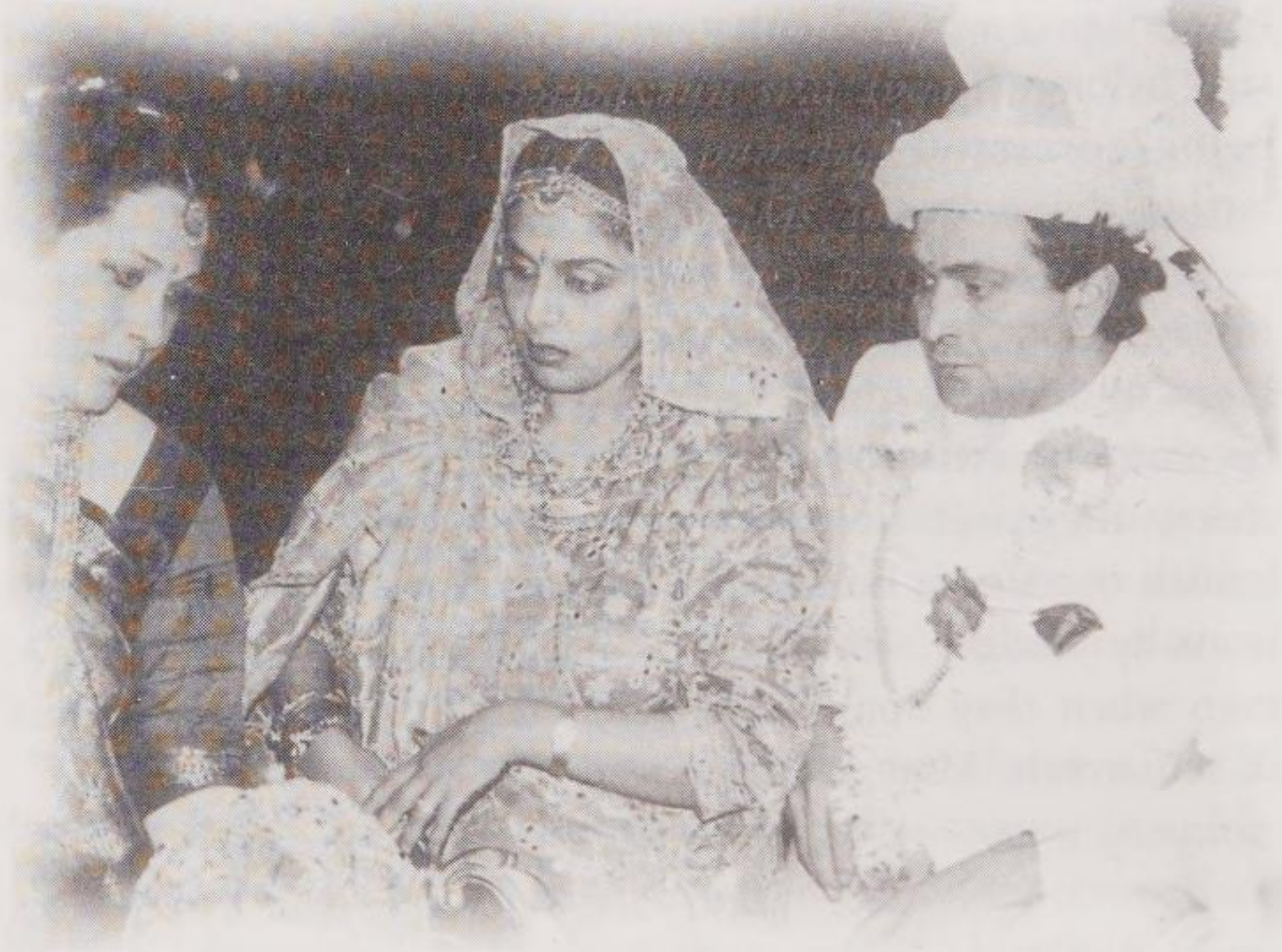
"It's interesting. I can already see the shades of the person I was going to become 16 years later. However, I think I had an image foisted on me, which I tried to live up to in my interviews. Someone who made good copy — unafraid of answering controversial questions or making boastful statements. I'm a lot more mellow now — I'd much rather discuss issues, events and people in that order — which hardly makes good copy! But it does make good conversation which I enjoy with my friends. At that time I still belonged to a mindset, where women felt guilty about being successful and sought to diffuse their success by letting themselves be identified instead by their relationships — with father, husband, brother or son — almost as though to say, 'Don't worry my success at work is not important.' Here at home I think a lot of actresses feel the need to become domesticated. But inevitably after they've had their share, they feel the need to either get back to films or branch out into a business or do something worthwhile. This is really healthy. It indicates that women choose to work, even when they don't need to, because it gives them a sense of self-worth. More power to them."



(Shabana Azmi)

1980

NEETU KAPOOR



It's a nice, cute little fairy tale. She was 14, ingenuous and pretty, when she met the rich, glamorous prince. And the two were drawn to each other by love's silken fetters, as Prince Chintu wooed his Cinderella in flamboyant Kapoor style. For Neetu to plunge headlong into the relationship and love unquestioningly was only natural, but what was unexpected was that even Chintu still disbelieves his own fidelity! What was surprising was that Chintu had begun to reciprocate fully in the relationship, with an intensity he was not aware he was capable of. And in spite of his statements like, 'The romantic scenes are going to Neetu's head,' they got engaged, deciding to happily-live-ever-after in 1980. Meanwhile, Neetu was to complete her films, complete her trousseau shopping, and do all those flurried, breathless things a fairy tale ending entails.

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Months ago on Id day, I had casually dropped in at Neetu's place for one of my usual how-are-things-going session. That afternoon, I found the mother and daughter busy packing clothes in suede bags. The contents included blue shimmer sequins, red shimmer sequins, white chiffons, silks, beautiful nighties, gowns, housecoats, packets and packets of cosmetics, perfumes, *salwar kameez* suits, more suits, *duppattas*, F'us jeans dumped by the dozens, T-shirts, pillow-cases with laces and cut-work, napkins... junk of various materials.

And — there was her bridal costume, diligently wrapped in layers of three different cloth pieces. Her *duppatta* was blood red, with intricate gold embroidery. Rich and tantalizing, except that it looked so heavy, I wondered how Neetu would carry — leave alone wrap — it round her shoulders. 'My *lehenga* is heavier than the *duppatta*. The whole thing amounts to 10 kilos,' she chuckled. 'I have made two special belts to go across the shoulders. It's beautiful — only, we actresses wear similar costumes so often in our films, that the charm has worn out.'

I saw her point, when just a few days ago I met her on the sets of *Rajmahal*, at Essel Studio. As I walked into the huge *Dharam Veer* — like set, horses and swordsmen were milling to and fro in the heat and dust of the afternoon. I spotted

Neetu dressed in a flaming orange costume with gold sequins shining in the sunlight. Playing a princess in the film, she was adorned with jewels and a fancy crown. Holding her flowing trail in one hand, she was using the other to shake hands with everybody from the cameraman to the director. It was her last day with the unit and there were murmurs of congratulations in the air. Someone was even distributing *ladoos*.

'I reached the studio at the dot of eight in the morning,' she gasped. 'Can you believe this? In my entire career I have never reached my sets before 10.30 a.m. The unit was shell-shocked. I had set the alarm for 6 a.m. and at 6.30, while brushing my teeth, I was waking up my sleepy hairdresser. There was no time for tea, so I had it in the car and of course, broke the glass in the bargain. It was so funny — while the building children were going to school in uniforms, I was racing down the staircase in full make-up and this gaudy costume.

'It was worth missing those few winks. Do you know, between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m., my director has taken 52 shots? It's mind blowing! I don't know how he's done it. I don't know how I worked. I feel I'm just breathing work these days. Last Sunday, for the first time after four years, I was working on a holiday. I finished my portion of work on *Teesri Aankh*. In the coming three days I should be completing three more films. Every day I am doing three shifts and later dubbing. My deadline is January 16.'

Almost every studio in town was holding a set for a Neetu film in January. Everywhere it was Neetu's dubbing, Neetu's close-ups. Broke producers, unable to organise finance, dumped directors unable to get dates, had their problems sorted out. 'I would have preferred to end my career on the last day with Chintu. Unfortunately, *Dhan Daulat* was the last of our films together. The last time we met was on the New Year. According to the Punjabi custom, the bride and the groom are not supposed to see each other, two weeks before the wedding. Today, is only the 5th! I still have 17 days to go for the wedding. This morning while I was coming to Chembur for my shooting, he was leaving home for his shooting. As our cars crossed, at almost the same time both of us ducked, so that we wouldn't see each other's

faces. My driver looked at his driver, they smiled and we went our separate ways. Isn't that hilarious?'

The tension of seven years of waiting, compressed into seven months of climactic activity, is telling. Both are overworked. At home, in Shailaja Apartments, the atmosphere is buzzing with excitement. Everybody is full of what they'll do and what they'll wear. The best dressed man at the wedding would, of course, have been Karan, Neetu's young nephew. Mama Singh had bought him an entire wardrobe from London and special decorative bells for pet, Tanya. At nights when the ladies of the house played *dholkis*, the mother and daughter had weeping sessions. Neetu said, 'I'm very attached to Tanya and it would have been lovely if I could take her with me as a part of my trousseau, but Mummy would never allow it.'

'N-e-v-e-r,' added Mrs. Singh emphatically. 'Do I want to die? The house will be empty and lonely once my daughter is married. I need Tanya. For the last many years, since *Do Kaliyan,* it's been a hectic life — shootings, dubbing, outdoors. Moreover, the wedding preparations have kept me so occupied, that the contrast will be unbearable. Much as I wish the sun, moon and world for my daughter, I tremble at the mere thought of parting.' Her lips went dry as she spoke, and all the shining diamonds failed to light up her pale face. She cheered up the very next minute. 'She'll be in the same city, at least. She'll be dropping by time and again. Due to sentimental reasons, I've decided to leave her room as it is. Everything — her cupboards, her drawers - nothing will be shuffled. She'll be visiting us and then, of course, she'll have kids. I am waiting for that.'

An *akhand paath,* a ritual the family believes in was in progress for three days at Kesar Villa, their new bungalow. Guests from up North were put in the same bungalow. In the evenings, there were great gab—sessions. On *lohdi-di-raat,* they lit a campfire and sang folk songs. It was noise all around. A fat woman with a child tucked at her waist... Another woman with a gaudy *duppatta,* chanted *shlokas.* A little child, played on the carpet with flower petals. And finally, Mama Singh in a pretty pink saree, looked indefatigably tired.

In the office downstairs, Chintu's childhood friend described

the R. K. cottage as a madhouse. 'Anyone who enters the house is drowned with work. Everyone is screaming because he can't cope with the tension. *Papaji* does not get very excited, but *Bhabhiji* is hysterical and by the time the wedding is over, she'll be a bundle of nerves. Her blood pressure shoots up even for a small dinner party — you can imagine how the tension must be these days. Chintu, of course, takes the cake. He is shooting all the time.

'Exactly like me,' chuckled Neetu. 'I've been shooting non-stop. I've not helped a wee bit. Not even in my own shopping. Mummy has chosen my entire trousseau. These days I'm observing *maieeya* — it's a custom in which a few days prior to the wedding the bride is denied good clothes, make-up or ornaments. This is to bring about a contrast on the D-day. Unfortunately, I've had to wear make-up for my shootings. The only cosmetic I use these days is Clinic soap. These traditions do have a meaning. I adore the *chooda* we are supposed to wear for a month. Thank God no tradition censors phone calls. If I don't speak to him, I can't live. I can't concentrate. I can't work.' Nor can Chintu. All these days Chintu was sending Neetu a bouquet of roses daily through his chauffeur.

'It's overwhelming the way everyone is being supportive. All my directors are trying to accommodate. All my emergency shootings are done without my co-star. Everywhere it is my close-up and the opposite person's double. Including Dr. Lagoo, who plays the central character in our production *Chorni.* If somewhere just the arm is seen in the frame, somewhere it is just the shoulder and somewhere it's the back. It's hilarious and I'm going to die laughing when I see these films. Today, because Aruna Irani is in Madras, I am shooting with her double. For *Ganga Meri Maa,* we had to shoot the climax and both Shatru and Amjad were not available. It was a hopeless situation and I thought the director would give up. Instead, he put both the men in masks, so that he could use their doubles. Also to maintain the mood of suspense, he put me in a *burkha.* Isn't he intelligent? Most of these films are started long ago but got stuck. Still, my producers are full of blessings for me. They say, 'Had it not been for you...' I feel the reverse: 'Had it not been for them...' After all, they could have easily said, what does she mean by she won't shoot? What about the vast

sums we've invested? But all of them are going out of their way and willingly, too. I'm very touched.

'I feel heroines wanting to marry should plan their dates in advance. That's if they don't wish to continue working after marriage. The problems begin because they quit one phase of their lives with unfulfilled responsibilities. They complain that producers don't have a heart. You should have a temperament to cope with home as well as work. I don't. I'm like a straight trolley with just a single motive in life. Even if I had to work for one month after marriage, it would have spelt too much tension. Everyone asks me if I am nervous about the marriage. I'm tense, but not insecure or uncertain. I've known him for seven years. What more adjustments could it entail? And even if there are, I am most willing. For two years until we have bought and decorated a home of our own, we'll be living at Chembur with his parents. Even Dabboo and Babita did that. After seven years of romance, this would be refreshing for the relationship. Besides, Babita *bhabhi* said that those two years were the best years of her life. My in-laws are great at fussing over you. This is my only opportunity to get to know them better.' What about her honeymoon? 'Hawaii and Singapore,' she said blushing beetroot red. Six months ago, shooting for the last day for *Dhan Daulat,* Neetu had been at her lowest ebb, feeling depressed and in the dumps. When she packed up, she told her fiance in a voice which was barely a whisper. 'It's the last day today.' He had not answered and her hurt had only deepened. Next morning, he phoned her and chirped, 'Wake up to our new life. And don't talk of lasts. This is only the beginning.'

It's the beginning of the happily-ever-after of a relationship which evolved against all odds, surviving the blows, torments and storms of scandals that all celebrated affairs are exposed to! The Neetu-Chintu romance has been a romance, everyone has identified with and blessed. Somewhere, all of us want a happy ending. That's why even outsiders like HMV are doing their cheery bit for the dream couple. They've made a special LP with all Neetu and Chintu's hit songs together, to be released on their wedding day. The label reads... 'MAD(E) for each other—our dreams, our songs.'

It has the dream-like ethereal reality of a fairy tale, strains of a soft serenade wafting through the dream, unbroken even by the stroke of midnight, when Cinderella usually had to rush home. On January 16, 1980, Neetu stopped work, and rushed home. She made sure not to leave behind her glass slipper, so no courtiers are going to rush after her.

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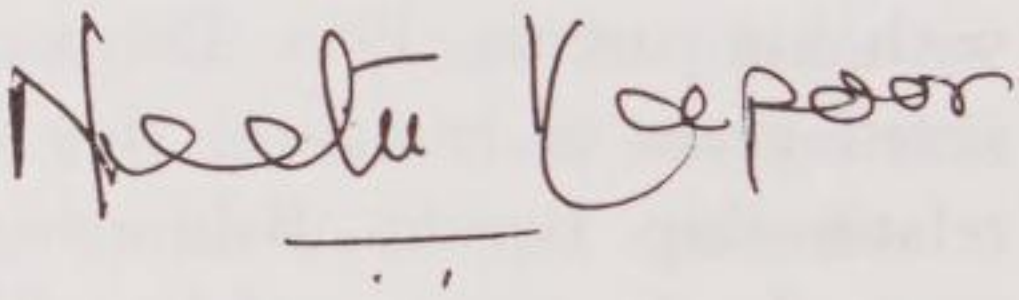
'Reading the article made me realise that the printed word has its own impact and cannot be matched with any other audio-visual medium. I've watched my wedding cassette on so many occasions but the joy of a written word cannot be compared. It conveys both, what's said and also what remains unsaid.'



(Neetu Singh-Kapoor)

1982

ZEENAT AMAN

She sits demurely in a corner, listening to a friend talk about her. Silently attentive. Unobtrusive. As if the person being discussed is not her, but someone else. The friend analyses Zeenat Aman. Zeenat watches on and listens, assimilating. 'I've never experienced anything like this,' she says softly. 'It feels different, even though there are certain things I don't agree with.' When she does not agree with what's discussed, she looks withdrawn. I drag her into the present, make her talk about the past. She looks strained, suddenly confused. 'I cannot remember what happened last Tuesday, how can I remember what happened to me 10 years ago?' She's not trying to be cute. We sit for long hours not knowing where to begin. And we make tentative forays into her memories to ease out the silence.

She's shy. Probably, more shy than she knows. People don't believe this, but it's true. Still, there are frequent outbursts, spillovers of emotions. In a way emotions cripple Zeenat. She is easily fatigued by them... drained in the effort of demonstrating.

Men who have loved her, say she lives for the present. Intensely. Completely. Genuinely. Yet today, Zeenat Aman appears to be full of restraints. It's because too often, people have called her effusive. She's shy of making the first move. Because too often, she has been labelled a fraud. She communicates hesitantly. Is articulate, but unrevealing. Because too often, she has been stabbed in the back.

'I have nothing very sensitive or profound to say. Life has not been too harsh or unkind to me,' she says, her eyes laughing. 'Maybe if I hunt in my diaries, I will find marathon passages... some of them morbid... or wild poems, but I'm too frightened to publish anything I've written. I don't have the confidence.'

We are at her home, at Napean Sea Road. The upstairs attic of which, I'm told, is crammed with crafts and creations that Zeenat indulged in her childhood. A tattered sack, now layered with dust — the beginnings of creativity. Then came the competitive wild world of films, the present. Her stubborn, pampeřed memories fill in the gaps...

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There were pony rides and there was a strange urgent cry.

Zeenat, age five, lives in Churchgate opposite the Oval Maidan with her nanny and her mother. She understands that there is a fairly unstable relationship between her parents because her father does not live with them and wonders if it's usual in other homes. Days are full of sunshine, watched from her balcony on the third floor. And in the evenings it's one more beautiful dress, and pony rides. Each day she reads a message in her mother's eyes which says, 'You are a special child... a love child... a special person.'

... I strongly believe that I'm a special child and will one day grow up to be a special person — whatever that means. I'm not a pretty child. I'm plump. And the first person to make me aware that I'm fat is my nanny. Every day when she ties my dress, she punches me lightly on the stomach and says, 'Bhaap!'... I'm throughly pampered. I get everything I ask for and even what I don't. It just occurs to me that I seldom cry... I'm not a cranky kid at all. But I'm very talkative. With my little arms swinging up and down, I have a hundred things to tell my mother. We do everything together. That is why today, when Mummy is not at home, the house looks deserted... empty.

... It's late in the evening. She has gone out of town. Nanny and I have just returned from my pony ride. I sit on the chair, dangling my feet, shoes still on. Nanny notices I'm not feeling good... how, when, why... I cannot understand but there is a strange urgent cry. There's some longing within, which is alien. I guess I just want to be with my mummy... or somebody else... another person... anyone, besides nanny. Lazily, I get up from the chair, walk to my desk and sit down to write a letter to my father. I don't remember what I write, but I remember dropping it in the mailbox. The next day, when the doorbell rings, I jump from the bed and run to the passage. It seems a miracle but my father has come to visit me. His arrival is purely coincidental. Obviously, he could not have received my letter so soon. I had neither his address nor the stamps. But I'm delirious. I firmly believe and continue to do so even years later, that his visit is because of the request in my letter. Ever since, I've believed and had faith that whenever I've

desired something strongly and wanted it badly enough, I've got it.

... Mummy has a visitor. Nanny tells me I must greet aunty and go to bed early because I'm not well. I enter the door which is ajar and say, 'Good evening'. Aunty picks me up and kisses me fondly. 'What a charming kid', she tells my mother. The two women laugh and talk at the same time, in the way only adults can. Outside the door I can hear them discussing me. 'Babusha is indeed very charming' says my mother proudly and gets down to tell her what happened yesterday... Yesterday, 'Chocolate Uncle' came home. I call him 'Chocolate Uncle', because he has never come home without chocolates for me. I play on the floor, with the box on my side. I will eat the chocolates the next day at school. The girls envy me because I carry large packets of chocolates. My mother who is awfully embarrassed by my gluttonous ways blushes uncomfortably and says, 'Babusha shouldn't you offer the chocolates to Uncle?' I'm not happy with her suggestion. I don't like sharing my chocolates with anyone. Besides, there's a special charm in opening the sealed box. And I want to do that at school, in the presence of my classmates. Grudgingly, I fumble with the box, trying as much as I can to delay the process. 'Never mind, my child. I don't want it. Save it up for a special day,' says the uncle. I feel relieved, but when I look sideways at my mother, she doesn't look happy. So I trot up to uncle's chair, unseal the box and say, 'What can be a more special occasion than your arrival?' To this day my mother rags me about the incident. She says, 'You were so small, you could hardly balance the box in your pudgy hands. Where were you hiding so much charm? So much diplomacy?'

I was insanely possessive about my mother.

School, summer holidays and 'mama' become the compartments of Zeenat's life. Mr. Heinz's name starts to appear rather frequently in the house... Also, it's her first experience of something negative. Mr. Aman, her father, dies. She is devastated by the morbid exposure.

...There is this boundless energy within me. In the morning I play basketball till I'm drenched in perspiration and my cheeks shine in the sunlight. Then I rush for a bath, where I splash water all over the walls and the ceiling. In the lunch break, I swallow my food because I want to play badminton.

After classes, while the other girls throw their bags on the bed and grumble about the French teacher, or plan the next midnight feast, I'm fighting with the warden, to allow me to go horse riding. There is no peace within me. I am always itching to do... do... do something.

... In the evenings, I go for long walks in the campus. The place is green, lush, beautiful. I walk miles just dreaming. Sometimes talking to myself... thinking all kinds of things. The nuns watch my vivacity and are at a loss how to control it. They decide that it can be channelised constructively if I'm given lots of responsibilities. I become the head-girl, the prefect. The troop leader of guides and captain of the basketball team. I'm participating in all the extra-curricular activities.

... At the end of the year, when the annual reports are announced, I'm in for a shock. It is the trend at school, that the first three ranks at every class are announced in the assembly hall. Unlike every year, I don't stand first... nor second... nor third... but eighth! I'm ashamed of myself. It seems the end of the world. In the night, I pray to God that I must die. I don't want to live because I can never face my mother again. Suddenly the 'special person' feeling fades. I jump out of the quilt covering me. With tears flowing down my cheeks I write a postcard to my mother in which I tell her I'm not coming home for holidays. She writes back and says that I mustn't worry and do better next time. She adds, that despite my report I'm still special and must come home. Delighted and pacified, I pack my bags.

... This is the first time I meet my stepfather-to-be. He's very tall. I have to lift my eyes to look at him. He does not resemble any of the other men I've known. His hair is curly. His eyes are a different colour... they are hazel. My mother tells me it's because he is a foreigner. A German. What I'm told, and I remember distinctly is that he also is a Scorpio — it means we have something in common. And we do. Both of us are forever hogging, hounding my mother for attention, and my mother, like a true Libran, is trying to keep both of us at bay. I'm insanely possessive about my mother. I resent sharing her with anybody. Though normally disciplined, I create a lot of scenes... I'm aggressive, throw tantrums, and wail loudly. When it becomes too much, my mother asks the nanny to take me for a walk.

...6.30 a.m.: We are at the mass. The headmistress announces that I must see her in her office before I go for breakfast. My heart misses a beat. My immediate fear is: 'Now what have I done?' My friends in the queue nudge me and give me questioning looks. Their raised eyebrows add to my anxiety. I replay the daily routine in my head. Were my shorts too tight at basketball?... Did I not cover myself last night...? Did I leave the toilet without flushing...? Did I not clean my drawer? I'm still thinking whether it is the untidy uniform, hair or shoes, when I reach the headmistress office. The headmistress surprisingly, is very tender with me. She holds my hand and speaks very gently. 'Your father is not well. And you are going home. But you mustn't worry or cry. Jesus will be with you. If you are frightened you must pray.' I come out of her room blank... sans emotion. Actually, it's a relief to know that I had not done anything wrong. On my journey home, I'm not frightened, but I pray.

... At Poona my mother comes to receive me. She hugs me and says, 'All will be well'. We come home. I'm asked to have a bath, but not allowed to get into my dress. I'm given my mother's saree, which is tied over my uniform blouse. Uncomfortable and confused, I'm brought to another huge, palatial house. Outside, there are cars parked in a line. Inside, there are people, rows of them. All in white clothes... they are crying, some of them wailing loudly, some of them merely staring. My father is dead. I don't get to see him. They have finished all the formalities without waiting for me... There's nothing left for me to do except stand and watch them cry and feel uncomfortable in the saree.

... I'm 12 years old. My parents were divorced when I was one. I've seldom seen my father. Today, I don't get to carry his photographs with me. When I ask for them, I'm told they are misplaced. I feel they've hidden them away somewhere. After a few days, I return to school. The memory of the room filled with people in white clothes stays with me. That whole night, I dream of my father... He stands in the school compound... waiting for me... I run towards him... arms outstretched... he lifts me up... then throws me in the air... I dream the same dreams every night till I realise it's a recurring dream. I don't pity myself and I'd hate it if anyone said I grew up in insecurity. I didn't. I was overwhelmed with love. That's why today, I'm able to love overwhelmingly.

... As I grow older, I do look at my missing out on a father as a void... something I missed out. And I hate missing out on anything. Several years later, when I'm older I bump into someone who has known my father closely. He tells me about him. About his work and emphasizes what a talented man he was. I stare at him in stony silence. I don't know what to say. My father died before I could discover him.

He was tall and he recited the Upanishads to me.

Adolescence proves painful and would have dwarfed her personality, but strangely, around this time, she builds a fabulous relationship with her stepfather, a major influence on her and her first window to the cultural world.

... Today, when people say I have a 'body' fixation and when the press labels me the greatest sex symbol, I remember those traumatic days when I was dismayed and shocked at the physical changes in me. I do not come out of my room without wrapping myself in warm clothes. As long as I'm in school, it's okay. Panchgani is at least, cold. But I continue to wear cardigans even after I come home for holidays. In summer, when Bombay is burning hot, I insist on wearing one sweater and over it a pullover. My mother tries talking to me. But I don't listen, don't encourage advice. Understandably, she leaves me alone. It becomes embarrassing when I'm socializing and the hostess in all earnest touches my forehead and asks, 'Are you cold, my child? Do you have fever?' Immediately, I start to sniff, rub my nose frantically with the tissue and pretend to die of pneumonia. I long to escape in a corner where nobody would watch me and nobody would ask why I was wearing a sweater.

... I'm in my teens, calmer, more mellow. Effortlessly and without pretensions, my stepfather and I begin to share an absolutely flourishing relationship. So much so that for the first time my mother is pushed in the background. He's an engineer, knows all about tools and machines. He fumbles with punctures and produces miracles. He's the first outside adult influence in my adolescent years and I ape him. If he is reading, I too bury my head in a book. The cupboards and the shelves are filled with books. He introduces me to books... all kinds of them... teaches me how to absorb what I read. He's writing a book on the philosophy of the East and West. I'm surprised how much he knows about our culture.

... He introduces me to religion, recites the Upanishads and the Vedas. And, on the other hand, he introduces me to the texts written on the religion of the West. He teaches me how to play chess... narrates adventure stories — about the war and the wounded soldiers. I listen to him for hours, my chin cupped in my hands... he's a rapid talker... Today, when I look at his grey hair and warm face, I find him very, very handsome. I didn't realise it then but, he must have been an exceptionally good-looking man in his youth. And as I say this, it suddenly occurs to me that beginning with my stepfather, I have known some of the most devastatingly good-looking men in my life.

... As the best student of the school, I'm granted a scholarship to study for one year in America. My mother has made arrangements for me to stay with her friend. An American family with two kids aged 15 and 17. Now I'm an additional member. At home, I'm in a perfectly Indian atmosphere, but at the University, it's one helluva experience! It's a phase when the country is going through the hippy revolution. The campus is full of freedom-loving, liberation-screaming students. All of them do what they like, say what they feel and then just walk away... Bright coloured clothes, long hair, strange ribbons and bands on the head, stranger footwear. Some of them walk barefoot with daggers hanging at their waist. The average age of the student is 17. The instructors are not above 21 themselves. Cool, unassuming guys walk with guitars strapped across their chests.

... In the class, there is Linsey Best. She is the first hippy I get friendly with and Linsey is mind-blowing! In that one year I spent away from home, Linsey proves a strong influence on me. I watch her with awe and admiration. She's only a year older than me, but she's different. She makes tweedys under her eyes, has curly brown hair, wears bizarre dresses (much later I ape her for *Hare Rama Hare Krishna).* In contrast, I wear long hair up to my waist and dress up in sarees. All the foreign students dress up to identify their nationalities. Linsey and I are always together. ... One day we are participating in a debate. I've prepared my speech and am perfectly confident but when I come on stage, something happens... In the hall there are rows of boys chewing gum or staring lazily. Suddenly I'm frightened.

Coming from a girl's school, I'm not comfortable talking freely before many boys. I am struck dumb. I start blushing, and when I start my speech I'm stammering. After the debate there is an uproar. Not accustomed to shy, naive behaviour, the boys are elated. They look at me as refreshing entertainment. Backstage, I'm flooded with undeserving compliments. Someone is asking my phone number. Someone else is asking my address. I'm terrified. But this is the beginning.

... As months roll by, I begin to feel comfortable in the atmosphere. A year passes like a month. When I return home, I'm a different person — half a Californian hippy, half Linsey Best, with only shades of Zeenat Aman. When I land at the airport, I'm wearing a loose kaftanish dress, one size too big for me. It's Linsey's, large, heavy, black boots. Bright yellow go-go-sunglasses. There are big beads hanging all over me, some bells jingling on my wrist, six rings on my fingers, and I have painted tweedys under my eyes, like Linsey. I speak in a strong American accent which is so strong that it can be cut with a bread-knife. In one hand, I hold a dagger (I still don't know why). In the other, I have six pipes of tobacco (a Swedish friend gave them to me on the flight). I'm waiting bag and baggage for my mother who walks past without recognizing me. I wave out 'Hi Mom'. She looks white in the face.

The sacrifice I will always remember.
Culture shock in America, communication gap in college, Zeenat promises herself to be remarkably astute and confident. And new seas await to be sailed in...

... I join Sophia college but leave the place in two months. I've nothing in common with the girls. There is a feeling of disorientation. They stand in the corridor and discuss the boys in their neighbourhood... childish giggles and whispers. I've grown up too quickly. I take up modelling. People around me are much older, and strangely, I feel more comfortable. Their lifestyle does not clash with my views formed in America or the Anglicized atmosphere at home. I enjoy my work. I enjoy earning money. This is the first time I am financially independent and I blow up every paisa.

... I'm offered *Hulchul* and *Hungama.* For *Hulchul,* I work for five days. For *Hungama,* several days. But on all the days I

feel very low and miserable. It's not that the unit is unkind or uncivil. They treat me with respect, but still there's a certain apprehension which does not go... I try sorting it out with myself. But I can't. Maybe it's the post-decision depression... Maybe I feel I deserve better. I'm not sure what I want. But every morning, when I leave for shooting my heart sinks... during work, before every shot, I die a thousand deaths, and in the night when I return from work, I weep... *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* is not released as yet, but everyone is talking about the film.

... My mother and I are busy packing at home. We have decided to settle down in Germany for good. Half the luggage has been sent by sea. The other half waits in packages. Dev*saab* hears of our decision and is horrified. 'Don't be rash... wait till the release of the film. If it clicks, you will become a star'. It's only a few months before the release. We decide to wait. The film clicks. And as predicted, I become a star!

... There's a long queue of producers, and never-ending phone calls. My mother and I are confused what to do. Without anticipating anything, we have delayed our trip and now we don't know how to handle it. In the meanwhile, my father doesn't know what's happening. He makes lightning phone calls, inquiring the cause of our delay 'Why haven't you 'left?' He asks. It's chaos. Ultimately, I make my decision. I want films as my career. My mother is not happy to leave me all alone in the film circle. She decides to stay back with me. She feels my need for her during that phase is greater. On her part, it's a sacrifice. And I acknowledge it to this day.

And finally...

The anxieties of a new career are over. Every relationship has given pain, at the same time enriched her. Provided strength, which existed as a mere skeleton in the past days, weeks, months, years, five years, ten years.

... These days I find myself thinking about death very often... I'm beginning to ponder very profoundly about mortality. A few months ago, a friend in Los Angeles writes to me about her parents' death. They died in a plane crash. I'm grieved with the tragedy and her pain. A week later, I receive a telegram, which says my friend has been murdered

— a burglar entered her apartment, robbed money, and while leaving, stabbed her with a knife. I'm shell-shocked... everything seems so cruel. The melancholy of human life seizes me. I wonder what life is all about... and if it's worth living...?

... So often one goes through phases when one stops to question even one's most intimate relationship. All the faith invested seems futile and unrewarding. Every happiness is bound with so much pain. I have gone through my lowest ebb... known the depths of it. I've known of a phase when just thinking of the most predictable has turned me hysterical... when I've woken up howling from my bed, unable to sleep... unable to control the sobs in my throat... It sounds morbid, exaggerated, but the fear experienced that moment was not false... because I continue to cry till the wee hours of morning. Still, I've never contemplated suicide. Touchwood. I've stayed with my grief and slowly come back to normalcy. It's strange, but the most mundane, ordinary thing can pull me out of the deepest depression. I buy a new dress, listen to music and I feel better. Yesterday, on my drive back home, I watched the sunset from my window, and it was so beautiful that I felt high on its sheer aesthetic appeal.

... In the past I've only lived for the present. But today, I feel it isn't the right way. Because no matter how you justify your today, tomorrow has to come... One mustn't curb today. But one mustn't spoil one's tomorrow. Last year, I wasn't feeling what I'm feeling today, and I know next year will be different. If you have known somebody older, and he has spoken to you about what he feels... you remember it... and as time flies and you reach the age, you feel the same... A cycle begins. I think there is something about age. Every year, every age has a distinctive season. Every decade casts a distinctive spell on an individual. It brings a certain wisdom, certain peace and alongwith it a certain fear. That's why I fear death... My todays are full. I don't want to die. And don't want those dear to me to die too. But I almost died a few days ago.

... Recently, on my return flight from Kathmandu, the journey is bumpy and disappears into the thickest of fogs. From the window nothing seems familiar. There are dark clouds, and we are lurching in them. There are air pockets.

And it seems as if the commander has lost control over the machine because there's a loud gurr which gets louder each time the plane bumps. I experience a strange feeling in my stomach... I'm petrified... Somehow, I'm sure it is the END... The book on my lap no more holds my attention. The black printed words seem like crows flying from the left margin to the right. In a desperate attempt, I begin to pray fervently... Let me not die... let me reach safely. I bend my head and turn to look at my hairdresser. She sits with her eyes closed and hands clasped together. A few seats ahead of me is my spot-boy, Jagdish... munching his bread roll. It's his first plane ride and he has no idea about what's happening... I envy his ignorance... it's a bliss! Suddenly I feel very responsible for my staff... Seven minutes pass like seven years, in extreme tension... There's a voice on the intercom. 'Ladies and Gentlemen, we've just defeated death, and now we are out of danger. Let us say a prayer of thanks to God!'.

... When I land at the airport, I'm shaking with fear. My desperate eyes hunt for a familiar face... There's none... No one has come to receive me. No Mummy... nobody... not even Tukaram, my chauffeur. Angry and hurt, I hop into a cab and drive home. By the time the lift reaches me to my door I'm boiling. Impatient and furious, I ring the bell non-stop... and continue to press the button until a frightened Agnes, my maid, opens the door. I storm into the house and yell for Mummy... She's not there... She has gone to Dubai... The house is empty.... I hate coming home like this... I've always wanted to come home to somebody. I enter my room, throw my jewellery on the floor... sit before the mirror and howl.

The dream, which haunted Zeenat for years, has stopped recurring. These days she dreams of a handsome white stallion riding towards her. From the window on the ninth floor, she gazes at the world. Her thoughts dwell in a remote land, where there's mist, and the earth is shadowed with trees... Zeenat sits there alone, after a tired day, watches the sunset and does soul-searching.

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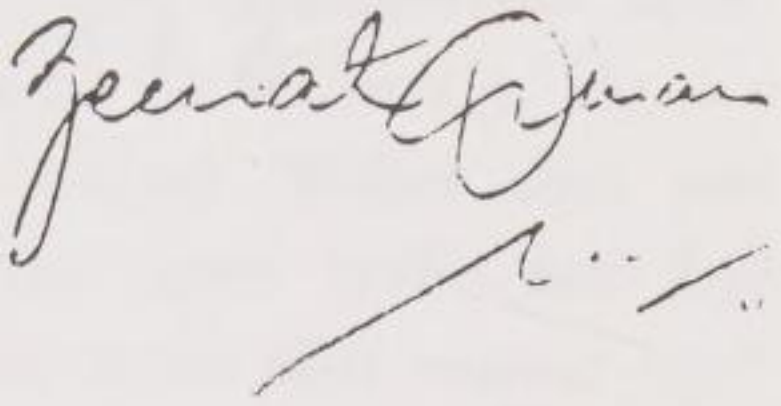
'It felt like a Pandora's box had been opened up. The rush of memories haven't stopped since then. Reading the old

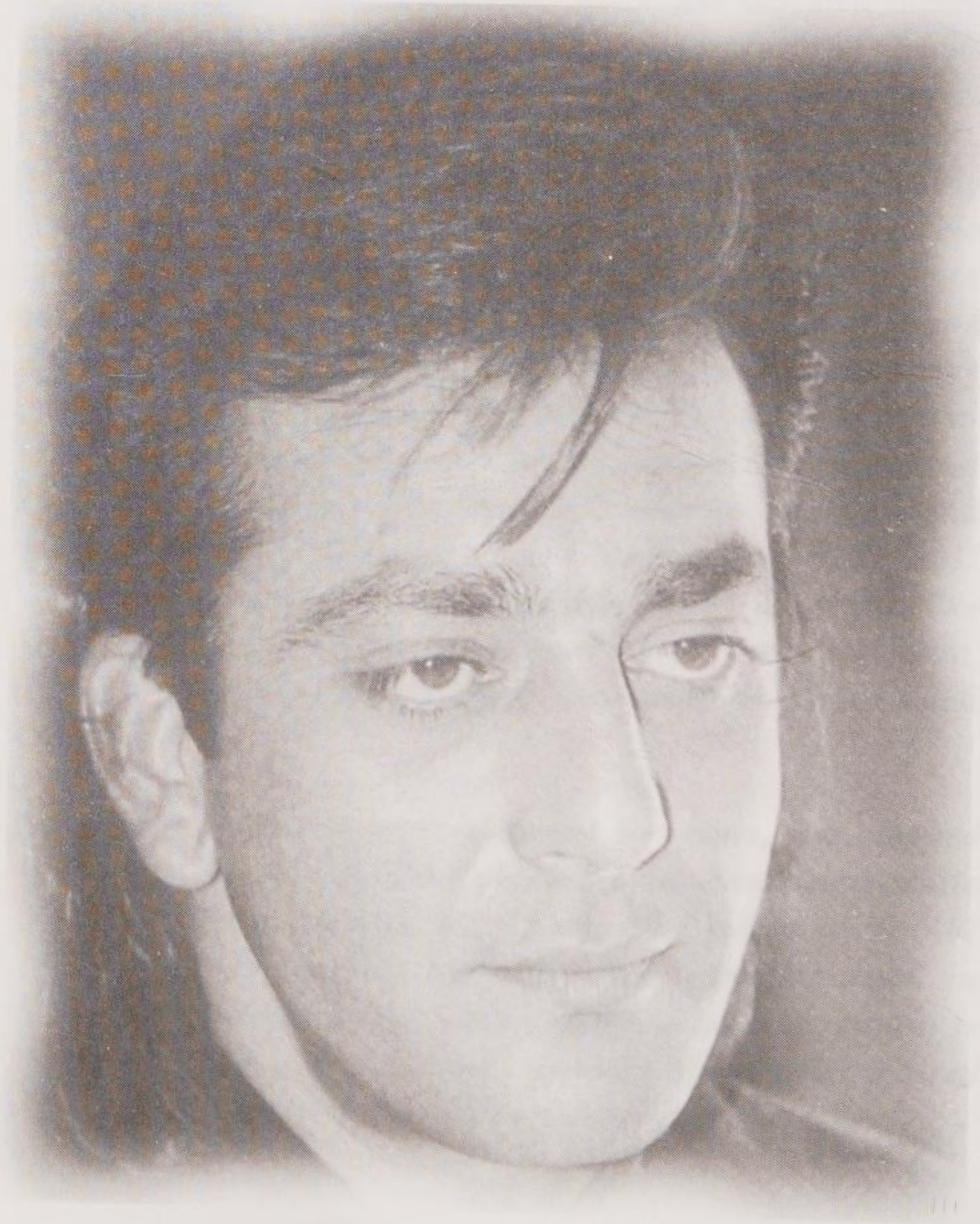
memories, I was transported to a different era, different home. I don't live in the same house any more. I was reminded of pleasant memories at Sherman, my old home in Napean Sea Road. I remembered my routine, the pace of life and most important, my mother. She was an integral part of my existence, my career. She was there to back me up at all my turning points. Today, she is no more. I'm trying to be to my children, what my mother was to me.'



(Zeenat Aman)

1982

SANJAY DUTT



We thought he'd never be able to do it, considering the freaky stories one had heard about him. And it nearly didn't get done... and for no fault of his. Despite the fact that he had slept at 3 a.m., despite the fact that he had no car, Sanjay Dutt refused to cancel the studio round-up. When he was finally ready, his dogs would not leave him. Each one took turns nuzzling him. Normally used to his air-conditioned BMW, he travelled by the local taxi, huddled in the back seat with two other people. Like any working journalist. Sweating in the midsummer heat, he grumbled about going all the way to Filmcity. As we parked at the studio, he turned reticent. 'What does one ask the stars? Is there any question your tribe has left unasked? Are you sure you want me to do this round-up?' Our hearts collectively missed a beat. Was he going to back out? He didn't. In fact, Sanjay Dutt had us in splits all through the day. He cracked jokes, punned, passed off the — record comments and whenever in trouble, used code language — Gujarati — 'havve soo karvanu?' *We guided him. 'I will not ask any personal questions. I don't approve of them. I'm a lenient journalist...' he warned us.*

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He carried his Marlboro packet, but lost his lighter. He borrowed our books, but misplaced the pen. Sometimes he jolted us by changing questions at the last minute. His explanation being, 'didn't you notice that she was in a different mood?' He spoke gently, addressed the heroines as 'Ma'am' and heroes as 'Sir'. He made a popular journalist. Everybody adored him — the stars were openly warm, prodded him to stay longer and the senior stars blessed him when he left...

B. R. Dubbing Theatre

An old man sits on the chair outside with his eyes closed. 'Excuse me,' we yell. There's no response. 'Excuse me,' we yell again. He continues to sit in the same position. Sanju looks out of the window and sings in a hushed tone, *'Jago Sone Walo'...* It works. He walks towards our cab. 'Who is dubbing today?' we ask him. He looks at us blankly. We repeat the question but he doesn't answer. 'I cannot hear well,' he says at last. Sanju opens the door of the cab and screams louder than a megaphone, 'Who is dubbing here today?' 'Kamal Amrohi' he says and vanishes. Upstairs,

veteran actress Veena sits with the headphones learning her lines, while Kamal Amrohi corrects her pauses. 'Good afternoon, Sir,' Sanju greets the veteran. We introduce ourselves. Amrohi looks confused. One of his assistant comes forward and helps him, 'Kamal*saab, yeh* Sunil Dutt *ka beta hai.*' A wide smile spreads across his face as his eyes shine in recollection. 'Hm... *itna bada?*' He looks at him in wonder, then gently pats him on the back and says, *'Kaho, beta...'* A shy Sanju fumbles: 'I have a few questions to ask, but we will wait till you have finished.'

We walk to the rear row and wait patiently. We speak in hushed whispers. 'Kamal*saab*, *kamaal hai*,' says Sanju shaking his leg. After 20 minutes, we leave the place. 'Why didn't you ask him any questions?' we scold him. 'How can I? He is so-o-o many years my senior. It would be bad manners to shoot questions at him.' As we discuss Kamal Amrohi in the cab, a black cat crosses our path. 'Oh shit,' Sanju grumbles. The driver reverses the cab, we change our direction. 'Everytime a black cat has crossed my path something dreadful has happened.'

At A Wayside Petrol Pump

There is a huge crowd on the road. Sanju looks out of the window, spots the generators, lights and says, 'Stop... stop... there's some shooting going on here.' He beckons to one of the guys and says, *'Suno, kaun* shooting *kar raha hai?'* 'Mithun Chakraborty, Ranjeeta,' he replies mechanically, then on recognising Sanjay, he does a somersault. 'Sanjay Dutt,' he gasps. The name echoes in the crowd. People surround the cab with shrieks of, 'Sanjay Dutt... *Rocky*... Sanjay Dutt...'

We are on the sets of *Sun Sajna.* In one corner, Ranjeeta waits squinting at the sun. Her secretary, Rakesh Nath, waves to us. Mithun Chakraborty comes forward and clasps Sanju in an embrance. 'Everytime I see this boy I feel very good.' Mithun pulls Sanju to one corner, and when we try following them he stops us with, 'Please, this is confidential.' Thankfully, they don't take too long. Next, it's time for questions.

Sanjay Dutt: *After* Ashanti *you have moved to the top bracket. Everybody feels that you have outclassed Rajesh Khanna in the film. How do you feel?*

Mithun: I have not outclassed Rajesh Khanna, because he is a CLASS in himself. Still, I feel happy that the public has liked me.

The two men chat, discuss varied things. 'Have you seen *Deer Hunter*? I've seen it 15 times,' says Sanju. They discuss some more films. Ranjeeta Kaur is inside the pump cabin, touching up her make-up. Sanju waits outside, uncertain how to approach her. He stops near the door and says, 'Ma'am... may I... ask you a few questions?' Ranjeeta looks equally embarrassed. She is amused because he calls her 'Ma'am'. She blushes, looks in the other direction while talking to him. There's no place for Sanju to sit, so he sits on the table.

Sanjay: *Of your forthcoming releases, which one do you look forward to?*

Ranjeeta: Asit Sen's *Mehendi*. It's a good role and I think I've given a satisfactory performance.

Sanjay: *Everybody refers to you as the 'surprise packet' in* Teri Kasam. *Critics say you are the best in the film...*

Ranjeeta: The role is not what was narrated to me. I tried to do my best and I'm glad I've been appreciated. When people come and tell me I'm good in the film, it lessens my hurt.

Mithun and Ranjeeta are called for the next shot. We exchange goodbyes. The crowd screams *Ashanti's* dialogue, '*Teri jaat ka baida maru.*' A few of them rush for Sanju's autograph. He signs rapidly, then rushes to hop into the cab. The cabbie takes his own sweet time to start the car. He seems to be enjoying the fan adulation more than Sanju. He feels elated when three dozen people keep hanging on either side, screaming '*Rocky... Rocky...*' Later when Sanju is not around, the driver shows curiosity. '*Ye Sunil Dutt ka beta hai, na?*' *We nod.* '*Is ke pas gadi nahin hai kya...? Yeh to bilkul theek lagta hai... paperwale bolte hain ke yeh charsi hai... masti karta hai... mara mari karta hai... Aisa kuch nahin hai...*'

We are on the road hunting for a bungalow called Radhika. In spite of detailed instructions, we lose our way. We drive from the third, to the sixth, to the second road... At last, when we reach the bungalow, ace villain Pran has packed up

and is leaving for home. Sanju touches his feet for blessings, and they embrace. 'How is Daddy... when is he returning from America?' 'Are you going to your next shooting?' Sanju asks Pran. 'No, my dear, I'm going home. I prefer working one shift. So does the government.' We hurry inside, worried that our journalist of the month might miss his favourite star (Tina Munim) for an explosive interview.

Before we can enter Tina's room, Sanju puts a finger on his lips and says, 'Shh... It's a surprise. Tina isn't expecting us. I've not told her we're coming.'

Tina is sitting on the sofa chatting with the director. Suddenly her eyes wander and she spots Sanju and she screams, 'What are you doing here...? Why aren't you shooting today?' Then turning to her man-in-waiting she says, '*Bhai, jaldi* Thums Up *lao*.' She wipes the sweat off Sanju's forehead and says, '*Baba*, why are you sweating so much?' We tell her that he has been travelling by taxi, like an ordinary journalist. Immediately she is concerned. She lowers her voice and asks in Gujarati if he wants to borrow her car? Sanju says, 'No.' Then in mock seriousness asks, 'Okay, what questions does the genuine journalist want to ask me?'

Sanjay: *Your name is being linked with Rajesh Khanna. There can't be smoke without fire...*

Tina: Ah ha... all the questions you journalists don't have the courage to ask, you make the star ask us.

We tell her that Sanju has worded his own questions. She turns to Sanju and smiles, 'Really...? then adds, 'What if I say this is a personal question?' Sanju shrugs his shoulder. Tina snuggles into his arms and says, 'You are my boyfriend.'

Sanjay: *People say that the scar on your face is because your boyfriend hit you...*

Tina (amidst melting looks): Why don't you ask my boyfriend?

Sanjay: *You had said that you will not sign films with ordinary newcomers. How come you've signed a film with Tushar?*

Tina: Because it's an excellent role. The film is being directed by an excellent director and they are giving me big money.

She snatches the paper from Sanju and tries to read what he has written. On another sheet of paper he scribbles 'She bullies me, so I think, you can think about that' (whatever that means). He puts his head on her lap and pretends to fall asleep. 'If you are a journalist you cannot sleep on my lap. I don't allow journalists to sleep on my lap. Get up,' she scolds him. He doesn't. 'What is your next question?' asks Tina. He whispers something in Gujarati. What follows is a scoop... In the presence of the frenziedly??? clicking photographer, Tina kisses Sanjay on the forehead, cheeks, nose and finally, the lips. We capture it all.

After 40 minutes we have to almost drag our 'lenient' journalist star. He comes away. Very, very reluctantly...

In Waheeda Rehman's make-up room, Sanju is on his guard. Once again he's the conscientious, reserved, well-mannered boy, full of *haanjis*. He addresses Waheeda Rehman as 'Aunty'. She calls him '*beta*', says '*Hamare yahan Khala ka haq Maa se zyada hota hai*, so if in future, I hear any complaints about you, I'll beat you up.' 'Yes Aunty, you can hit him,' says Tina, joining us at that moment. 'I have a right to hit both of you,' adds Waheeda. 'Only my daughter would never forgive me, for she adores Sanju. The other day she went to see Rocky, and ever since, she sits scanning film magazines for your photographs. The other day she told me, 'Mama, *ye Rocky hai... mujhe uski neend, neend ankhen bohat pasand hai*! Sanju, why don't you come home one Sunday? I'd like to watch my daughter's expression when she meets you.' Sanju nods, 'I'll most certainly. Now can I ask you some questions?

Waheeda Rehman: *Achcha...achcha... woh kuch journalist bane hue ho, bolo to kya bolna hai mujhe...?*

Sanjay: *Everybody is raving about your performance in* Namkeen. *Are you satisfied with your work?*

Waheeda: To be very honest, I'm not. Personally, I feel I could have done much better. The role was good, but I had certain apprehensions... silly reservations. Like, right to the

end of the film, I was not satisfied with my get-up of the old woman. I don't know how to explain it, but I was constantly complaining to Shabana, '*dekho yeh theek nahin hai...woh theek nahin hai...*'

Sanjay: *How does it feel at this stage of your career?*

Waheeda: In our industry, to be remembered, you have to be working in films. If you close shop because you are not getting good roles, then people forget you. Abroad, an Audrey Hepburn might be hunted and offered a brilliant role, because only she could do justice to the character in *Bloodline*. Unfortunately, such things don't happpen here. Hence, until a brilliant role comes my way, I will continue to play a mother, widow, *bhabhi* or a sister.

Interview over, we say goodbye. Waheeda Rehman is travelling with Tina Munim. On the road somewhere, Tina's white Fiat overtakes our taxi. Immediately, Sanju leans out of the window copying a fan's delight at spotting a film star and screams. ...Tina Munim *jaa rahee hai... dekho dekho* Tina *jaa rahee hai... arrey* Waheeda Rehman *bhi hai...*' Tina blushes, then aping him, she yells. 'Sanjay Dutt... Sanju... *dekho* taxi *mein jaa raha hai...*' At the signals, our vehicles meet again. 'Keep my boyfriend busy till 7 o'clock,' she requests us. 'I'll be home by 7 p.m. Then I will take over.'

Suddenly, Sanju is in no mood to continue his interviewing. 'Can't we call it a day?' he asks, 'If you want, we'll continue tomorrow.' 'No!' we scream. 'Okay let's have some lunch at least.' He insists on going to his office for lunch. On the way, we stop at Ajeet Dubbing Theatre. We are told that Shabana Azmi is dubbing for Shekhar Kapur's *Masoom*. He's confused about what questions to ask the two of them. He scribbles some points then reads them out to us, revising his spelling and grammar.

Shabana is busy in a story session with Raman Kumar of *Saath Saath* fame. 'It's you?' she says. Sanju falters, 'May I disturb you for five minutes please?' 'Absolutely,' she smiles. 'But first let me have a look at your handwriting.' He hands over the paper to her, she reads with amusement. 'Not bad at all. I was expecting a childish scrawl.' He looks happy, like a child who has been praised.

Sanjay: *You initiated 'heroine-oriented' films. Now when films like* Jeevan Dhara *have flopped, won't producers stop making such films.*

Shabana: People don't know this, but an unexpected film like *Shama* has done stupendous business. A stray example of *Jeevan Dhara* cannot kill the prospects of heroine-oriented films, because if a film flops, it's the film which has failed, not the fact that it is a heroine oriented story. Besides, how long will the audience want to see action films? Or how many love stories can you make? Therefore, the only alternative we have is to make films on women's subjects.

Sanjay: *How bad do you feel when a film you've worked hard for doesn't do well?*

Shabana: Extremely bad. For *Yeh Kaisa Insaaf* and *Ek Baar Kaho*, I didn't but if *Arth*, does not do well, I will be very upset. I will be heart broken.

Sanjay: *In all your films, you play the eternally suffering wife, rejected for the other woman. Aren't you overdoing the suffering wife image?*

Shabana: After *Yeh Nazdeekiyan, Arth* and *Masoom*, the 'wife' role seems to have become a bit too much. So much so that if in real life my husband were ever to tell me about his 'other woman,' I will probably clap my hands and say, '*Arrey dost, pehale kyon nahin bataya?*' It's because I've exhausted every other reaction for the screen. And this is one of the reasons why I've not accepted Mahesh Bhatt's next film (though it was very painful to say 'no' to Mahesh), which is again the role of a wife and quite similar to my role in *Masoom*. I'm trying to do different roles. Like in Lekh Tandon's new film, where I'm not a wife. Thank God, Sharmila Tagore plays the wife! And I play a tart!

Sanju's pen races. 'Will you remember everything?' Shabana asks, her eyes teasing him. 'I think so,' he blushes scratching his head. When we get up to leave, she kisses Sanju on the cheek. 'You are a harmless journalist. You haven't asked me a single nasty question. Thank you.' Casually, he inquires about her film *Avtaar*, in which Shabana Azmi plays Sanju's friend Gulshan Grover's mother. 'I may play numerous mother roles in numerous films, but I will NEVER play a mother to you, Sanjay Dutt, remember that!'

In the adjoining room, Shekhar Kapur is relaxing, chatting with a few friends, eating oranges offered by new wife Medha. Shekhar and Sanju shake hands and get down to discussing cinema.' Shekhar offers to show a song picturised on Naseer and a child star.

Sanjay: *Now that Masoom is complete, how does it feel?*

Shekhar: I'm impatient. I feel I should quickly finish the dubbing and release the film.

Sanjay: *Would you call yourself a hero's director or a heroine's director?*

Shekhar: When I first watched the rushes of *Masoom*, I realised that I have made a vital contribution to Naseer's performance, whereas Shabana's performance is more her own. I guess that marks me out more as a hero's director. But I don't like to think in terms of such classifications. It limits me.

It's 5 p.m. at the Ajanta Arts office. Our last interview over, Sanju walks barefeet from one end of the room to another switching on the air-conditioners, the fans, and finally the music. He orders food for everyone and lunch over, he stretches himself on the sofa. As we watch, *Chaudhvin Ka Chand* on the video, he falls asleep...

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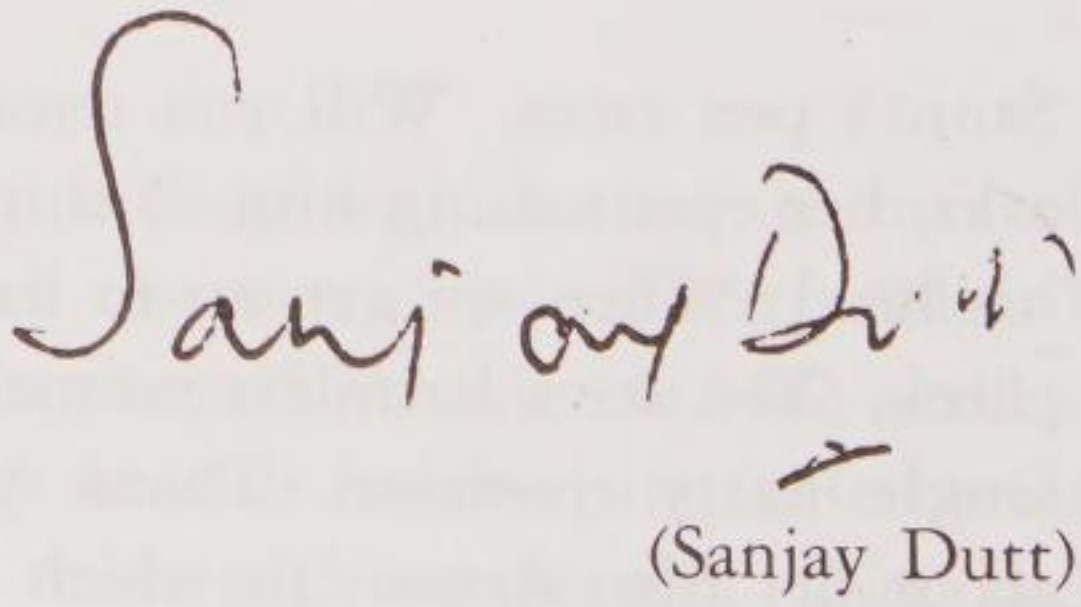
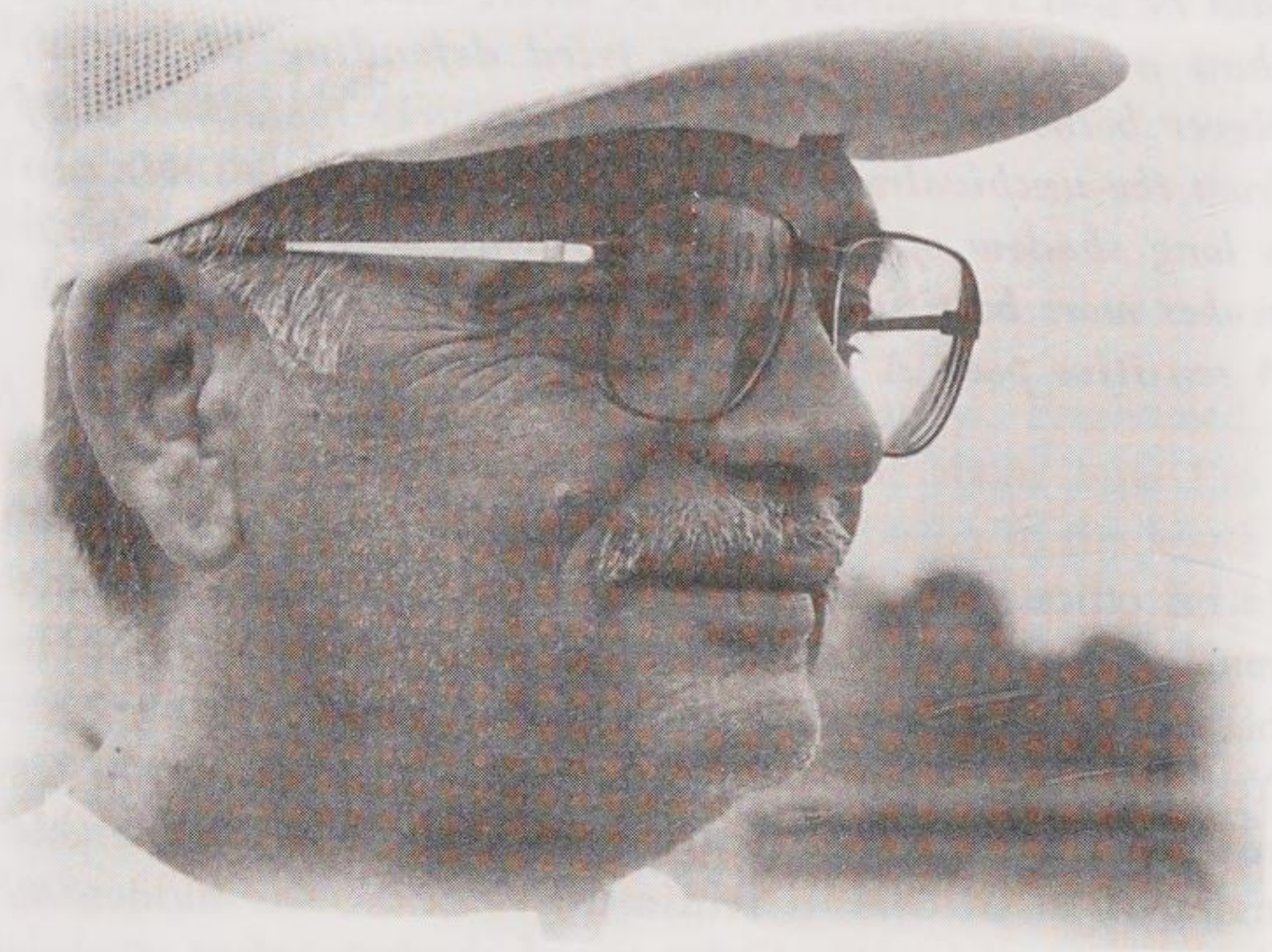
'Did I really ask all those questions to so many people? Some of the questions and the impressions are rather good. It was amusing to read the reactions after so many years. I had forgotten all about playing a journalist for a day. The piece brought back pleasant memories.'



(Sanjay Dutt)

1982

GULZAR



In his poems he appears to be obsessed with the moon. Draws all kinds of analogies. Romanticizes it. Compares it to the face of his beloved. At home, he removes his spectacles and asks, 'How many years ago was it that Armstrong landed up there?' In magazines, he is always linked with his heroines to whom he writes love poems and songs. In Pali Hill, he lives in a deserted bungalow, filled with furniture and paintings, looked after by dozens of servants, but impoverished by the lack of a woman's touch. Mysteriously unpopular with men, irresistibly popular with women, Gulzar lives in the minds of people either as a conman or a lover in solitude. Dashing heroes found it unsettling competing with an unglamorous writer. They would have preferred him to have been less arresting. But what makes Gulzar special, is his sensitivity. His enemies said he was so sensitive that he wrote more like a woman, than a man. Gulzar never tried defending his stand. Never bothered to explain his image. He remained aloof from the unchivalrous details of growing scandals. He cast a long shadow of silence. And silence is a repartee that evokes more hostility. It gave dimensions to Gulzar's aura. A sensitive poet. A shy man — a distracting image.

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In his office I tell him I want to trace his lifescape. 'I don't remember my past,' he replies. It should be easy for him. He has his poems, his books, his films, his songs, his paintings. Yet, Gulzar's memory has faded. A week later, sitting in his room he makes a conscious effort to tap these innumerable moments... incidents... sentiments that he has hidden so deep within himself. As he travels back in time, Gulzar realises that the nostalgia is soothing. 'It feels good,' he says shyly. 'It balms my wounds.' He has been through a phase when he lived in the past. Today, he feels that no present is complete unless the past has been reflected upon, understood and finally accepted. He talks like a writer. Chooses words that sound beautiful... rephrases words for rhythm. Body language and expressions change as hours go by. Amidst long pauses and deep sighs, the writer rattles. Memories rush, refusing to follow rules. His lifescape is erratic. There are flashbacks, flash forwards. And there are his poems.

It's another day. Upstairs in his study, Gulzar sits at his desk, scribbling on paper.

I brought up a daughter
Sweet and cunning
She knows how to get her way with me
Like any other woman.
She makes me tie her laces,
Then tells me how to put the knot.
I tie her sash
She tells me which edges to pull.
I fumble through her homework
The blocks, the addition, the new maths
She recites her poems to me
Swinging her arms
Swirling the frills of her frock.
'Papa, I love you -
And you love me too
Are we not lovers?'
From one to five
And five to eight, she grew
Till I realized...
She has brought me up!
I am an eight-year-old father!

A small child, kicking her feet from the nappy... Frightened, I stare at the one-year-old. I'm paranoid about how I'm going to bring her up. There is utter confusion in the house these days. Then, from nowhere a Nepali woman, Jetli arrives. Bosky's nanny. Gradually, she takes over. Days pass... Bosky grows. One day Jetli quits and confusion strikes all over again. This time the child is a bit older, she throws her share of tantrums. In the mornings there is panic until Bosky leaves for school. Either her canvas shoes require polishing or her compass box is missing. Her hair causes the maximum tension. Each time the servant plaits her hair, she rips it open and says, 'This is not the way. My teacher will scream!'

Eventually, I decide to master the art myself. I realize it isn't difficult. You divide the hair into three parts... put the right on the centre and the left on the right. That's all. The servants are relieved. Bosky is amused. 'Papa, you are so funny,' she giggles, covering her mouth with her hands. As I comb her hair I have a feeling of deja-vu. When I was a child, my father used to comb my hair for me. He would struggle to get the parting in the centre. And I would giggle, shaking my head.

My mother died when I was one year old. I will never know what she looked like because there are no photographs. All I have is the memory of the *bazaar*. I am two-years-old, crying uncontrollably. The servant rocks me at her waist trying desperately to calm me. Suddenly, she turns my face and says, 'See, there is your mother!' The woman she points to, bends slightly and waves. I stop crying and stare at her. She waves and smiles... her side tooth has a gold cap. In a little boy's world, an image freezes. I was starved of the image of a mother and unconsciously, this stranger has left me with a s-e-a-r-c-h. I search faces for a face that resembles the image I have. Of that woman in the *bazaar*. And even today, I can never imagine my mother without a gold cap in her side tooth.

My breath burns
Like acid throughout my chest
My body is blistered
And my heart is like an open wound
Ever since I heard the innocent taunt of a friend.
'He will take what he gets, even the sorrow,
For does he not reap money from the matters of the heart?'
What is one to do with such people?
Who bend the yellow champa flower to see if it contains some gold.
As for fragrance —
They know nothing of.

Whenever something hammers agonisingly at my soul, out of desperation, I reach for the paper. These are moments of anguish, and it needs an outlet instantly. Why should I be apologetic about using this pain in my work? It happens naturally, unobtrusively... It does not make the moment false.

What is unfortunate is that even writing does not come to your aid in moments of despair. One has to wait until the sorrow abates. The seed may be there. But the words flow much later. Most of my poems are born while lying awake at night. Bhushan, a dear friend, once asked me, 'Do you ever sleep? How come you never wake up startled?'

Moon, is a recurring word in my poems... Even as a child, for hours, after everyone had gone to sleep, I would lie awake staring at the moon... sometimes my busy father

would come where I was sleeping, gently tap my shoulder and say, 'Still dreaming?' and I would quickly shut my eyes and pretend to be fast asleep. Strange, that the first song I write for films is also about the moon.

Bimal Roy is making *Bandini* and is on the lookout for a new writer. A few common friends take me over to Mohan Studio. He hears my name, Gulzar, and assumes that I'm Muslim. 'Why have you brought him?' he asks Debu Sen in Bengali. 'What does he know about Vaishnav Kavita?' I tell him I do... there's a long apprehensive silence. Reluctantly, he narrates the situation for the song. I listen attentively... but the atmosphere is very tense. Sachinda and Bimalda are fighting... Bimalda says, 'A sheltered girl like Kalyani would not step out of her house to sing a song.' Sachinda argues, 'If she doesn't go out, will she sing a song like that before her father?' 'Why not?' screams Bimalda. 'If she can hear Vaishnav poems from her father, why can't she recite them to him as well?' 'Because we need a song. Not a poem. And a song will be stifling inside the house... It calls for nature. If Kalyani does not step out, I will not compose the song. Period.' 'Then take her into the verandah, but not beyond that,' warns Bimalda.

I'm utterly confused and frightened. I stare at the two men blankly... I still haven't heard the situation. Eventually, Debu takes me home and narrates the entire script. The next day, Sachinda takes me home. For four hours he repeats la la la la... on the harmonium. My head is reeling... bursting with the la la... Debu Sen... Bimalda... Sachinda... In exasperation, I come away. In solitude as I walk home, I think about Kalyani... What does she feel...? What are her thoughts...? What is her mood...? Would she feel helpless...? Sorry...? Guilty...? I stare at the moon... My song is born... *'Mora gora ang lai le.'*

It's late in the evening. We are sitting in the lawn, sipping tea. Everyone is talking about Bimalda's illness... He has throat cancer and is at the last stage. He cannot talk anymore. When I visit him at his home, I see him suffering. He has difficulty in swallowing his spit. I come home very depressed. Hemantda says, 'It is any day now... one of these days we will hear the news that he is no more...' I hate him for saying that. I'm enraged to think that anyone can be so casual and detached. I run out of the place, escape to the

terrace and cry for hours. Four days later, exactly as Hemantda had predicted, we get the tragic news. A little boy comes panting... 'Bimalda is dead!' he says. There is pin-drop silence on the sets. 'He died a very painful death,' the boy continues, 'the last few hours were torturous...' Even though we expected the news, the finality has stunned everybody. The director finally says, 'Pack up.' It is only when I bury him, that I realize how deeply bonded I felt with him. Also a feeling of guilt, which has been lurking within me ever since I could not reach in time for my father's death (I got the news two days later), has suddenly vanished. I realise that suddenly, it isn't important any more whether I make it as a writer... I don't have anybody to prove myself to... Father was always worried about me. Whenever he saw me scribbling he said, 'You will write columns and live on the mercy of your brothers.'

I wish my father could come down from heaven and see me today.

A round, blown-up, tired balloon, the sun
Rests on the tip of a precipice
As an acrobat balances a ball
On his finger tip
If you blow at it, will fall into the water -
The balloon will collapse and another burning day will be
e-x-t-i-n-g-u-i-s-h-e-d!!

I've bunked work because I want to watch the England India test match on TV. Gavaskar has made 223 runs. I feel jubilant. There's a personal pride in Gavaskar's achievement... Nothing is as fabulous as being able to defeat these haughty, horrible Englishmen! I feel a sudden relief as if a long-cherished desire has been finally fulfilled... the venom has been simmering for so many years. Actually, I would have felt a greater thrill had Gavaskar picked up his bat and hit all of them a couple of times on their swollen heads. No treatment we give them can be worse than the humiliation they've made us suffer. I burn when I think of those days. The wounds are still raw... the memory ripe.

In school, we long for the weekends so that we can play *gilli danda* on the roads. But these are the two days we are never allowed to play. On this day, the Viceroy visits Roshanara Baug and no Indian is allowed to be seen on the roads...

How we dislike the Whites! Our parents hate them! The Viceroy's visit is a great event.

Preparations for it begin days in advance... They wash the streets... sweep the corners... clean the city. Dozens of men and women are at work. 'Today,' everybody says, 'Delhi is beautiful...' It sure is. Every week the roads are given a bath, the city is given a facelift. From a distance, one knows that the Viceroy is coming... one hears the echoes of the drums... the band... and as the carriage draws closer, the drums and the band become louder. In the balconies there are huge crowds. People jostle for space, hold the bannister tight. We watch the Viceroy... He walks with a thump. Proud as a peacock... dazzling in his perfectly tailored uniform! We watch him in silence, using our roads, our vehicles, our money, and ruling our country.

In retrospect, when I think of all the brainwashing that was attempted, I'm surprised that there is any residue of intelligence, talent or wit... The Whites wanted to crush every grey cell in us and turn us into vegetables. In Std III, I remember I was forced to learn poems like '*Chuna choo... chua choo... bada ho ke main dhobi banoonga*'. Good handwriting was another fetish. Learning to think was ignored completely... And why not? All they wanted was good clerks. My handwriting was atrocious. Every evening, I was punished to write 200 lines. Finally, my father who was frustrated watching me write these lines, came to school and asked my teacher, 'Do you have any tablet which can cure my boy's handwriting...?'

Ram Ohiri is our group leader. Every afternoon the young and the old gather in the courtyard where Ram reads the controversial paper, *Jung*. And every day while Ram reads the news, a whole bunch of us just hang around the place getting bored. We wait impatiently for him to finish reading the news so that we can then go and play in the garden.

One day, we are waiting for Ram as usual... He turns the page and reads the headline loudly. 'Germany attacks Russia!' An old man sitting in the group shakes his head and says, 'Russia *ko nahin choda*... Asia *ko kya chodenge?*' I stop dreaming and stare at the old man. I like the sound of what he has said. I like the rhyme of it... the sentence echoes in my head all day... 'Russia *ko nahi chhoda*... Asia *ko kya*

chodenge!' Unconsciously, it's the beginning of my writing phase. Every beautiful word I hear appeals to me actively. In class, I have another idol, Akbar Rasheed. During the Urdu periods, our Maulvi encourages us to indulge in *bait baazi* (debates). Nobody can ever outclass Rasheed.

He's brilliant. After school very often, we go for *mushairas... durbars...* and everytime I hear the *wah-wahs...* I feel tormented. 'When I grow up,' I tell myself, 'I want the same echoes...' I believe that no one is born with any promise of talent. You may inherit the atmosphere... but you have to nurture, sharpen and polish the tool yourself. Sometimes a strong reaction from a dear friend can dampen your zest only because you're sensitive to that person's reaction. I remember I desperately wanted to learn to play the *sitar*. 'There's no need,' said a friend. 'You're a poet and you should concentrate on writing.' I didn't learn to play the *sitar* but it was something I always wanted to. Now, years later, I'm learning it.

These are sentimental moments, our Achille's heel... we all have them. Hence when Bosky is still very young I buy a *sitar* for her. 'If you learn early, you will master it early,' I tell her. She wears the ring and plays the instrument, but puts it down the next moment. 'Chee... it hurts...' After that I don't force her. She doesn't have the aptitude. Much later, on her own, she begins to play the piano. Today, Bosky splashes paint on the white canvas and when I enter her room she says, 'It's for you, Papa.' I frame her paintings and put them on the walls. Many years ago, I had come downstairs, disturbed by the screams in the kitchen. The servant was yelling at my little girl for scribbling crayons on the wall...

No No
Please don't rub them out
Let their lines alone
With soft, small, pink hands
My sweet child
Has drawn there
Crooked lines
What if they form no shape
They retain the hands of my child
I recognize myself in those lines.

From the crossroad
Past the market
Through the bazaar
The paper boat floats past lal gali
Flowing on the orphan rainwater
On the wayward paths of the town
I pause and ask
'Does a boat reach its shore?
Will I ever reach mine?'
An innocent child
By giving meaning
To the meaningless
To a scrap of old newspaper
Has been cruel
In his innocence.

Meena Kumari dies in the nursing home. She dies without saying 'goodbye'. All night we wait outside her room anxiously... she does not regain consciousness. She leaves her diary for me. I'm touched but not surprised... Her diary is not the secrets of her life as it's later made out to be... They are mere jottings... records of thoughts she didn't wish to forget... records of feelings, yet incomplete to be termed poetry... a gesture of attachment.

Our relationship was based on tiny things which mattered tremendously... She recited her lines to me... I recited my lines to her... We discussed poetry for hours and criticized each other ruthlessly... We exchanged books and shared the characters which impressed us...

On the sets of *Benazir*, as an assistant, it's my duty to summon stars from their rooms. I go to call Meena Kumari for a shot... Sometimes Bimalda would delay the lunch break without warning. Everyone would be famished, but no one had the guts to tell him so. So, Monaco biscuits were smuggled and passed around secretly. One day she was slyly munching a biscuit during rehearsals and Bimalda said, 'Forget the rehearsals... Let's do the take straight away.' All of us trembled.

Meena died because she couldn't stop drinking. She had promised everyone she wouldn't drink... but she did... She hid the bottle under her bed. Even when she was very ill, her well-wishers did not stop fighting for her... hoping for

her. All her directors waited for her to get well and resume work. I waited too. Till the last possible day, I wait to picturise the song '*Chand Katora...*' for *Mera Apne*. It's my favourite song and I don't want to film it in the background... But that's exactly what happens... She has become very weak in her last days and cannot concentrate on her work. While shooting the *aangan* scene, where she sits and serves tea to the two boys, she performs carelessly. After three takes, I'm still not happy with the shot and insist on one more but she brushes me off and says, '*Nahin nahin... nahin... theek hai*'. I'm angry...and we pack up. In the evening, when I meet her at home she says, 'You are angry because I didn't do the shot well... What to do...? *Mein bahut jaldi buddhi ho gayi...*' her answer makes me very depressed... I regret scolding her... It was such a helpless thing to say. And so honest.

This poet that dwells within me
Has forever shovelled the sand
Of moonlight in my heart
He has always collected the pebbles
Of sorrow from life and thrown them
At my eyes
He has ripped my soul raw with
His teeth
He has constantly racked the
Scratches of my burning breath
He has poured molten lava
Over my shoulder
Only to tell me
That pain gives understanding
The same poet today flees
From his own shadow
And says;
'Come, let us end ourselves'.

In a moment of frustration, I tear up all my poems and throw them in the fire. Afterwards, I feel an acute sense depression... But I tear the poems only in disgust. Whilst selecting poems to be published, I scan the file and I'm horrified at the mediocrity. I don't like anything I've written. And I destroy it all. After two days, I'm back in the mood and writing all over again... It's unbelievable how critical one gets of one's work with the passage of time. Yet

all of us have, at some stage or the other, been through phases when we have actually believed that we are geniuses. In my college days, when I was a member of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), I scribbled non-stop and could not stop blowing my own trumpet. Kaifisaab (Azmi) was our mentor those days. In his home at Red Flag Hall we held the regular *mehfils*... and *mushairas*... All the intelligentsia gathered there... Sardar Jaffriy, Akhtar Ul-Iman, Majrooh Sultanpuri... They recited poems. After their marathon discussions, we youngsters were asked to recite our verses... it's a simple routine to encourage young talent... but boy, how seriously we took ourselves!! Our poetry!! Maybe it was the atmosphere... The room filled with thinking people... The loud arguments... The tinkle of tea glasses, the Charminar packet as it passed from one hand to another. It was considered very prestigious to smoke Charminar... It was a common man's brand. Of course, some of them slyly smoked Gold Flake from Charminar packets... We watched them because we could not concentrate on the recitation all the time, we understood so little.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz was in jail and each time he posted a new poem, the city quaked with excitement. On the street, in the *gullies,* from the *paan* shop to the office desk... The news echoed... 'Faiz has written a new poem... Faiz has written a new poem...' Hearts thumped as one of the good poets recited his work... The room filled with emotions. Sighs... nods... shrugs... shadows of pessimism on the faces of these great men.

I cut out streamers from colourful papers
And stuck them on the wall
I collected each and every idol
And burnt incense each day
To turn this house into a temple
But ever since you have
Arranged flowers in the vase,
Ever since you have included
The essence of your beautiful presence
You have turned the temple to a home.

'Ghar shabd mein kitni mithaas hai' – a fan writes to me after seeing my film *Grihapravesh*. I agree with her but the next instant, as I think of my home in Deena I get a sinking feeling... I have a strange phobia about that house. The

visual memory of it is so strong that to this day I wake up with nightmares. I remember the long passage... and the room behind the passage. I remember the darkness... and the old trunk lying rusted in the corner... the eerie sound grips me... The trunk was filled with warm clothes for winter... Once something dreadful happened there...! And after that, I hated going to the room. Not even in my memories, because today, I understand, and it leaves me frozen.

In Koovar Lodge in Delhi, all we possess in the room is a cot, a fan, a window. The flooring is so weak that if we pump the stove a little hard, there is one more crack. Since then, I've developed a phobia for floorings. Whenever the architect comes home, I tell him, 'The flooring should be strong.'

In Ram Jhalani's outhouse, what I like very much is the bathroom. You climb two steps before you reach the door. But why am I talking only of homes...? I think it's because of that perceptive girl who glanced through Bosky's paintings and said, 'All that your daughter paints is homes.' Until she points it out to me, I have never realised this. After she leaves, I stop and gaze at Bosky's paintings... It's houses all the way...

So what if Bosky is shifting between two homes? She's getting more than enough from both. Bosky wouldn't be what she is today, if her circumstances were different. Her atmosphere has sharpened and enriched her senses, and to a certain extent spoilt her. I don't tell lies to my daughter. I treat her as an adult. She treats me as an equal. If I argue with her she says, '*Papa, bahas mat karo*.' What is important is that she should grow up with discipline and total respect for both her parents.

My relationship with her mother is not a juvenile drama... We don't duck our heads when we meet on the roads. We don't run miles away if we happen to meet at a social gathering. We are civil, like two adults... When we talk on the phone, it's mostly concerning the kid. Sometimes when Bosky is eating her breakfast and needs something urgently from the other home, she asks me to ring up her mother, 'Tell her to send my pink dress... with the white belt... and the matching band... Hurry up, Papa, I'm getting late for the party.' I do it for her... There's no getting up on a high

horse. When it is Bosky's Parents' Day at school, we attend the function together... Our separation is not dramatic.

No relationship ever ends completely. No relationship ever dies... It transcends to a different meaning... Sometimes changing makes it richer. All of us change. Life changes us... We change our relationships.

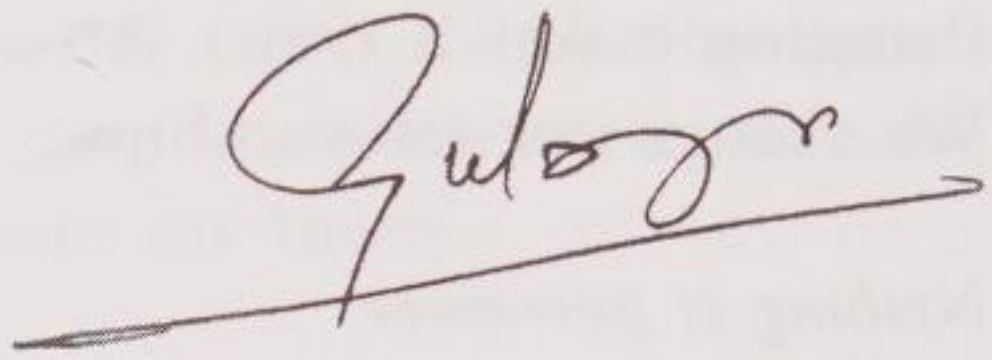
Nothing is permanent
Nothing.
The nights and days
Fall like dice on the chequerboard,
One holds the trumps of cards
Then slips them, spends them,
The shadows change light patterns.
Nothing is permanent
Nothing.
The only thing permanent is 'Me'.
'Me', that keeps changing every moment.

One more day has ended in Gulzar's life. At night, while eating an early dinner, he shares his day with his daughter... tells her about the poem he has written for her. Bosky, preoccupied with the thoughts of decorating her room, listens distractedly and says, 'But what about the 200 rupees, you promised? Aren't you giving it to me? Please Papa. I'm only shopping for my room.' 'Little girls don't spend so much money. Not even for their room. And what about the Smash T-shirts you bought yesterday? Was that for the room too?' He pats her head and escapes to the bathroom. When he comes out of his bath, outside on the table, there is a poem waiting for him:

My Father:
I have a father,
Who gives me money
I'd not hate him rather
He loves me as honey.
I love my father too.
He polishes my shoe.
He's sometimes sweet, sometimes funny.
But today I want money,
So away, he's running.

❀❀

'It's a case of Dorian Gray. While the interview remains young and beautiful, age has appeared on my face. I wish you can make me young again with another interview!'



(Gulzar)

1982

ON THE SETS OF *MANDI*

The morning begins with the sound of a horn. It's time for Shyam Benegal's unit to leave for the location. As the sound echoes through the corridors of Hotel Rock Castle, booked exclusively for the unit, the unit hurry through their bath, breakfast and rush downstairs. A special bus waits outside to drive the unit of 50 to the location... They get inside, screaming, shouting, fighting for window seats.

The bus vibrates with a medley of sounds — a transistor blaring the morning news in one corner... a nasal voice humming an old song in another... Arguments, discussions, incomplete conversations about yesterday's shooting. The girls are still getting ready — one is combing her hair, another draping her dupatta, the third slipping on her bangles. Somebody reads the morning paper. Somebody else, carrying a walkman, sways to the music. When at last the bus is ready to leave, there is a loud shriek of 'Wait wait'. Always, someone has forgotten something... Or, somebody is left behind.

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The drive to the location is more like a picnic. They sing, they recite, play drums on their seats... Every day they play '*antakshari*'. And every day they complain about sore throat.

It's interesting watching them because even in the smallest role, Shyam has cast a talented actor from the stage or the National School Of Drama. Even the behind-the-scenes crew, is young and talented.

Dev Benegal: Shyam's nephew and chief assistant. A fair face with a firm jawline. Dev is allergic to delay, disturbance and women. 'Why can't women be like men?' he complains, 'Why can't they be sensible?'

Joy Roy: Shyam's second assistant. He is late Bimal Roy's son. Tall, fair, and persistent. Joy goes about his work unerringly until a brazen Shabana Azmi asks him his age. Then, Joy blushes.'I'm 24,' he replies apologetically.

Kalpana Lajmi: The continuity girl. She is Guru Dutt's niece. Plump, vivacious and talkative. Kalpana's problems are never-ending. Every morning she asks everyone the same

question, 'What day is it today? Thursday or Friday? Shooting drives me crazy. All I remember is dates, dates, dates.'

Saba Zaidi: The costume designer. Saba is Shama Zaidi's cousin and a personality on Delhi TV. Until the girls go on the sets, Saba is tense and restless. She gets after them checking and rechecking details. 'Did Shabana carry her handbag? Did Smita wear her rings?

Nitish Roy: The set designer. Nitish is 27 and the only replacement for the late Bansi Chandragupta, according to Shyam. His files are an amazing collection of sketches, drawings, the minutest of details... Boxes, borders... fences... Every page of the exercise book is the marking of a genius.

Today, is the first day of the new schedule. The excitement is apparent. The artistes jump out of the bus, with wild screams of *aahs* and *oohs*. They wander around the place, surveying the details of a street set with unconcealed passion.

'Look at the house...' exclaims one. 'Look at the shops,' says another. 'Look at the *dargah*.' 'Look at the *mela*.' The chatter goes on and on... 'Look at my *Ankur* posters outside the shop... God! I look so young,' says Shabana. Om Puri who plays a slimy photographer in the film comes to us, beaming. 'Have you seen the studio? It's simply fantastic. I can't wait to begin shooting.' 'When is my dance scene?' asks Naseer squinting due to the sun. 'Is it in the afternoon, or late in the evening?' Shyam Benegal nods paternally to all of them, smiling. He wears his white suncap and disappears with, 'Work will begin after the lunch break.'

On the other side of the road is a one-storeyed house — the brothel or *Bai's adda* as it is referred to by the unit. It's by far one of the most authentic set I have ever visited. Earlier, an empty, barren space, I would never have believed it was a constructed set. The dusty road, the tin-roofed shops, the street lamps, the mosque. And finally, this house. As I meander from one room to another, the feeling of being inside an actual brothel creeps in... The rooms have a peculiar smell. It's probably because of the muddy flooring. There are gaudy curtains with characteristic laces and frills. The dark greens and purples on the walls... The stained glass windows... The *chameli* in the small garden outside, neatly

bordered with red bricks. The wide beds with printed bedspreads on them, the *surma* box on the dressing table and the circular common balcony with a coloured bannister, the high ceiling without fans and finally, the glossy painted doors with a peculiar latch and a peculiar squeak.

In the room downstairs, while sipping hot tea, I'm narrated the story of the film in a nutshell. It's about a group of prostitutes who are thrown out of town. Angry and defeated, the women find a new dwelling many miles away from the heart of a nearby village. The men, however, strongly attracted to the prostitutes, come seeking them in their new surroundings and gradually settle down there. Slowly, the whole town shifts to the village. The film is a comedy with serious undercurrents.

2 p.m. Lunch: The dining room is a tent, with benches and tables thrown together. Sunlight pours in from outside, but the unit seems unaware of the heat, so engrossed are they in their food and conversations. In one corner is the steady sound of the banging utensils. Amidst the cacophony, I'm introduced to the rest of the unit. The artistes...

Ila Arun: Her face brightens up the minute she starts talking. She has dancing eyes, and she sings all 24 hours. 'I was happy dancing Rajasthani folk on stage and then, unexpectedly, this film came through. Of course, I was excited... I shuffled my programmes overnight... Came to Hyderabad. Let's see what happens in future.'

Anita Kanwar: A dreamer. The unit nicknamed her 'Ms Dreamland', because always... always... she's dreaming. She's also very fond of singing. Her favourite song is *Fernando*. 'In this film, I'm supposed to be the sluttiest of them. So what if I don't look one, haven't you heard of miracles on screen?'

Soni Razdan: She acted in *Bandh Darwaze*. Even now when she is not required on the sets, she rehearses for her play. The twin roles don't disturb her. 'Nothing distracts, acting is nothing but switching on and off.'

Neena Gupta: The bespectacled girl of *Saath Saath*. She plays the prostitute who runs away to become a heroine... hence she is the gaudiest of them all—wears ribbons, ornaments, has elaborate hairdos. 'I've forgotten acting. I honestly have,'

she says bitterly. 'My friends were angry with me for doing *Saath Saath.* I hope they like me in this film.. I'm also doing *Utsav.*'

There is Aditya Bhattacharya, who in the film, is supposed to be in love with Smita. For some strange reason, he sits sulking. Smita Patil is preoccupied. In between morsels she chats casually with Naseer. They are discussing the recent awards function. Ratna (Naseer's wife) is talking to Saeed Mirza, who is rolling his eyes wide while making his point. 'But I firmly believe that this (whatever it is!) is wrong...' he says. Ratna looks bored. Om Shivpuri is talking to Satya Dev Dubey about the previous days shot. Dubey is preoccupied. 'Has my ticket been confirmed?' he asks the man on his right. Nira Benegal catches Dubey's word 'ticket' and immediately gets down to give a hundred messages for her daughter Pia. 'Tell her to call me up. Tell her to have her dinner on time. Tell her to go to bed early. Tell her to look after herself and tell her...' 'But Nira, my ticket is not yet confirmed,' Dubey tells sharply.

Shabana tells nobody in particular, 'Yesterday's *biryani* was delicious.' But when she realises that nobody is paying any attention, she shakes Shyam vigorously and asks, 'Did you eat the *Biryani* last night, Shyam?' 'No, he ate *khichdi*,' answers Nira, on behalf of her husband.

The shooting is to begin only late in the evening. They are to shoot the scene showing the festival of *Urs*, so the *dargah* is being illuminated.

4 p.m.: Summons to the costume department. Five of them snuggle inside the hired car, and they are driven to the venue. There are three spacious rooms. One of this is reserved for the costumes. They call it the dress room. Dozens and dozens of gaudy sarees, garish net blouses, technicoloured painted petticoats hang from the hooks. All kinds of costume jewellery, ribbons, plastic bangles and *bindis* are laid before the mirror.

The other two rooms are reserved for make-up. Getting ready takes more than an hour. A special hairdresser comes to make those peculiar curls and waves. A special make-up man comes to paint the primitive *tatoos* on their arms, chins, fingers. In every corner, with just a small mirror arranged on

the table, the actors uninhibitedly get ready. Naseeruddin Shah ties a turban with a towel.

Naseer: 'For this film I've had to wear these half pants and show my hairy legs. Lucky man, Shyam Benegal, he gets to exploit my 'wow' sex appeal!'

Aditya: 'For this film I've managed to keep away from the camera... Not do any photography. Lucky man, Shyam Benegal, he succeeded where even my girlfriend failed. Two whole months without clicking pictures.'

Om Puri: 'For this film I've borne the stink of coconut oil in my hair every day. Would you believe my hair has actually grown a few inches? A miracle, but a tragedy as well, because the barber cuts it every day for the continuity... Lucky man, Shyam Benegal, I don't grudge it. Otherwise, have you heard of hair growing in old age?'

Smita Patil: 'For this film I've bleached my hair. It'll take months to regain its normal colour. Lucky man, Shyam Benegal, I don't complain, with the wigs, hairpins and blow-drying I'm exposed to, I'm left with exactly three hair on my head.'

Shabana: 'For this film I've put on loads of weight. Can you believe, 12 whole pounds? Lucky man, Shyam Benegal, that I don't argue when he orders me not to diet... Imagine, it's just a week before I leave for Bombay, and I look grotesque!'

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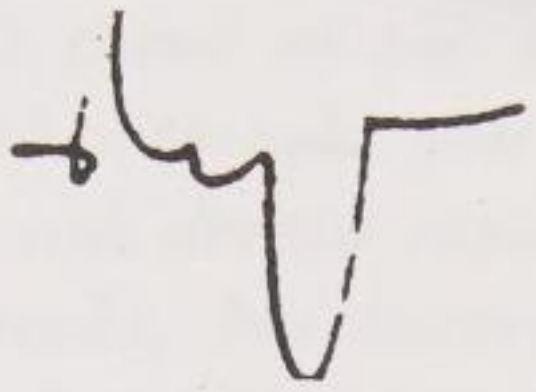
'It brought back many wonderful memories. I suddenly realised what a galaxy of talent had come together in *Mandi* — actors, technicians and writers. All the famous names of today — each a star in his/her own right. Shabana, Naseer, Om Puri, Annu Kapoor, Amrish Puri, Ila Arun, Soni Razdan, Neena Gupta, Anita Kanwar, Ratna Pathak Shah, Satish Kaushik, Dev Benegal, Dayal Nihalani, Ashok Mehta, Nitish Roy, Samir Chawda, Satyadev Dubey, Shama Zaidi, costume designer Saba Zaidi, Kalpana Lajmi, Saeed Jaffrey, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, late Ismat Chugtai and the marvellous late Smita Patil. I just can't believe it. They were all there. It was a sentimental moment for several of them whose careers were poised to take off. To imagine that the

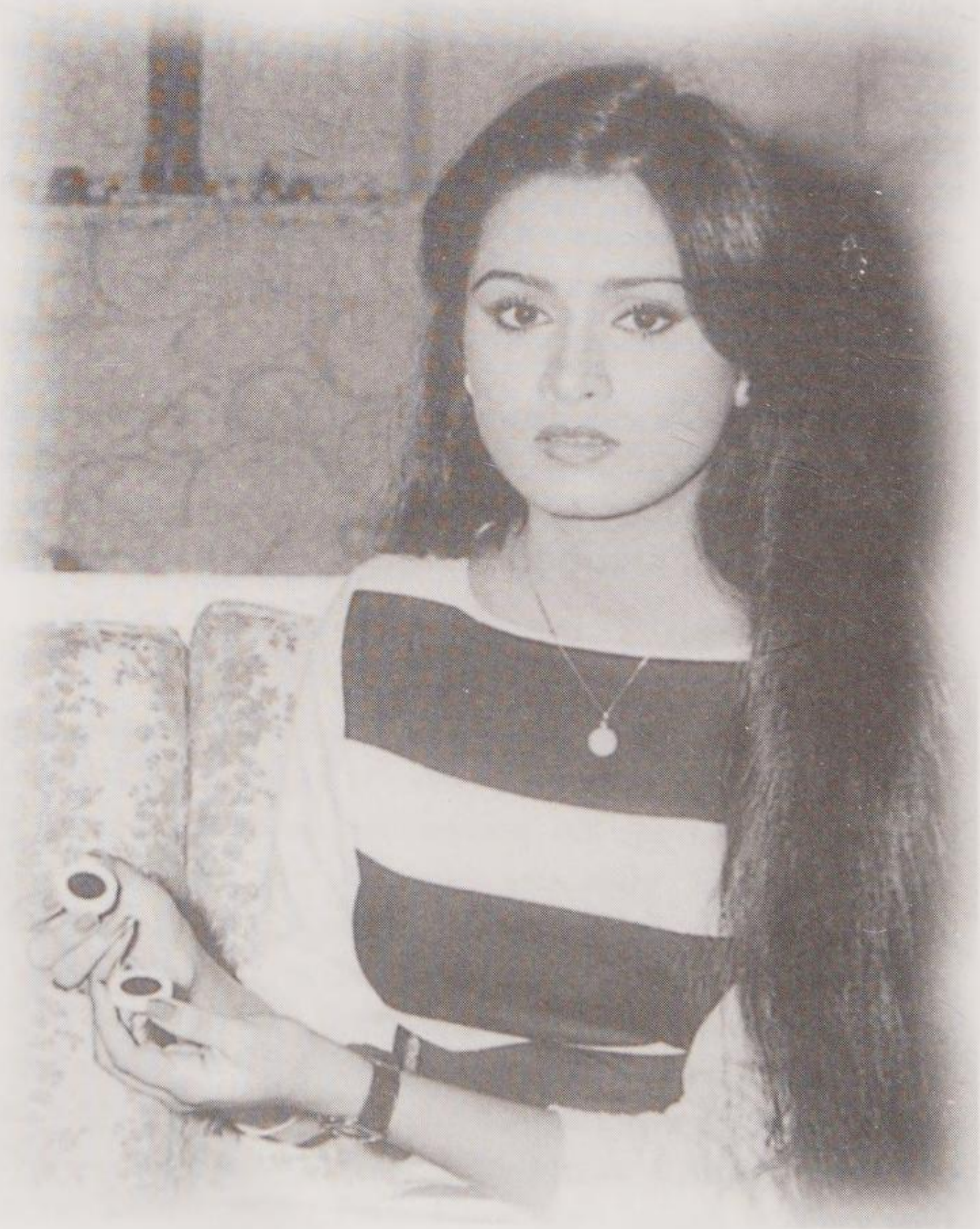
seed was sown during those bus trips for the phenomenal success that Anu has had with '*Antakshari*'. The making of *Mandi* ranks as one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had as a film maker.'



(Shyam Benegal)

1982

PADMINI KOLHAPURE



How does it feel? You are 17 and people chase your car, just so that they can have a look at you... Even if it's a glimpse. Ask you to sign on a filthy paper, which they preserve as something precious. How does it feel? Every face you look at smiles at you... Strangers, you don't know them, but they recognize you. You don't stand at the bus stop queue waiting for a 63... or an 83... to take you to college. You are gently ushered into the car, driven royally to the studio. No delving into textbooks. No tutorial headaches. No rummaging your wardrobe. A comfortable life. In the morning, when the mirror shows a pimple, the fear is not what the boyfriend, but what the director will say. Last time it happened, he scowled and said, 'It disturbs my close-ups.' You don't sit by the night lamp, studying for exams, worried about your grade. You lie on the bed, staring at the ceiling, thinking of the pathos 'Manorama' would feel in Prem Rog. *On the sets, the child-woman sits huddled in a red and yellow bandhni. The saree is pinned at five different places, but Padmini Kolhapure still looks uncomfortable. 'Hi,' she smiles. The familiar wide grin. Only the smile does not reach her eyes. Stardom has taught Padmini Kolhapure to smile mechanically. She smiles at no less than 200 people a day. Hour after hour, the young actress goes about shooting, rehearsing, emoting and smiling...*

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8:15 a.m.: The Kolhapure household has barely woken up. I ring the bell and a boy first looks through the eyehole, then opens the door. In one end of the room, Shivangi, Padmini's elder sister, is reading the morning paper. In the neighbourhood the transistor is blaring a song from *Zamane Ko Dikhana Hai*. Shivangi too is humming the song. She looks up from the paper and gently asks if Padmini is expecting me. When I nod, I'm requested to wait. It is a typically Maharashtrian living room, complete with the Ganesh photograph. There is seating arrangement on two sides. There is another small divan near the door. A recent addition for innumerable guests who need to wait for the star. As I survey the other details of the house, Mr. Kolhapure, Padmini's father, enters. He plonks himself on the sofa, makes a few phone calls and asks the man-in-waiting to get him *garam chai*.

The tea comes from the kitchen upstairs. The Kolhapures have bought an additional flat on the third floor in the same building. 'After Pandi's work started increasing we needed a bigger place naturally. And since it didn't seem right to immediately shift elsewhere, we purchased the flat above. Now, half the family lives upstairs, and the other half live downstairs,' says Mr. Kolhapure.

Padmini's room is downstairs. The two sisters share a room. The sister tells me that until recently it was a problem to sleep on the same bed with Padmini. 'She was such a great one for kicking that in the morning I was invariably on the floor. Padmini is an unusually lazy, sluggish girl. When in school, no one dared wake her up even if she was late. She would get up and straightaway slap you. Her reaction induced such a fear in me that I learnt to first shield myself with the pillow and then wake her up. With my parents of course she was slightly better behaved. Still, it was a task to get her out of bed. Every morning it was the standard record of five minutes... four minutes... three minutes... two minutes. Now of course she's become a responsible girl,' concludes Shivangi proudly. 'For an eight o'clock shift she is wide awake at seven o'clock.'

8.35 a.m.: Behind the door, a quiet Padmini stands eavesdropping on our conversation. She leans over the sofa where I sit and says, 'I'm listening.' She's still in her nightie and hides self-consciously behind the curtain. Her father, between sips of tea, tells her about some appointment he has fixed for 10 o'clock. 'No... no... not today, Daddy,' Padmini wails. 'Today, I have an appointment with somebody else...'

Between the sisters, the first topic of conversation is music. Shivangi, coiling her hair, 'Did you hear that number last night?' Padmini rolling her eyes, 'Yes... It's terrific... I freaked out... I'm taking it along to my shooting. It's fun to hear music when I'm shooting at Seth Studio.' Suddenly she looks at the clock and says, 'Shit... I'm going to be late today.' And she runs for her bath.

8.45 a.m.: A young girl with short hair and a lacy frock enters the room tapping her slippers. She goes inside the bedroom and comes out carrying her books and baggage. She is Tejaswini, Padmini's youngest sister. 'There is a nine-year

gap between Padmini and her,' explains Shivangi. The two girls rattle away in their mother tongue, Marathi. However, when she notices the three rings in her kid sister's finger, Shivangi yells in exasperation, 'Why don't you remove those hideous rings?' Tejaswini does not react to her. Shivangi lets out a deep sigh.

8.55 a.m.: It's a regular family atmosphere. An everyday family morning... Mrs. Kolhapure in a purple saree and a white blouse looks hassled and preoccupied as housewives do early morning looking after tea, and the work schedule of every family member. She has just packed off the youngest child to school and now flops down on the chair inquiring after Padmini. '*Kuthe geli Pandi... Angolila ahe ka?* ' (Where's Pandi? Is she in the bath?).

I cannot help thinking about the family. Is Shivangi jealous of Padmini's success...? Are all these rumours of rivalry between the sisters true? Is Padmini exhausted with Shivangi's interference...? Or is the elder sister really the woman behind the star's success? Do the sisters mind not having a brother...? Does the younger one get teased at school by her friends? Somehow, the mother impresses me the most. There's a primitive strength about her which is endearing.

9.05 a.m.: Padmini comes out of her bath wearing grey jeans and a beige top. Her wet hair is tied in a towel. She sits on the sofa humming an old song. Her mother sits in the armchair talking to her leisurely. Padmini jerks the towel off her hair. The water drops on Shivangi's face. 'Pandi,' she screams... 'Oh... sorry,' Pandi says and walks to the door. Under the fan she dries her hair with the towel. 'Even if I'm very late, I never use the drier... It gives me split ends.' As she says this she casually feels her face and instantly her expression changes...

'Eeks! I think there is a new pimple coming up.' She rushes to check her face in the mirror. When she comes back she is frowning. Her mother says, 'You don't take the medication seriously. Did you apply the cream last night?' Padmini's expression is as if she's going to explode... She does not... 'She did,' Shivangi comes to her aid. Padmini does not answer. People don't realise this but she has turned hypersensitive to the sheer mention of the word pimple. It's

her Achilles heel. In defence she gets up and starts packing cassettes that she wants to take for the shooting.

9.15 a.m.: Mr. Kolhapure enters and says that a particular director has an appointment with her at 9.30 and if Padmini does not want to be delayed, she had better hurry and leave immediately. 'She still has to have her breakfast,' says the mother. 'No, Mummy I don't want to eat. I had better dash...' 'What do you mean?' says the mother. 'I've specially prepared *idlis* for you...' Upstairs, in the dining room, we sit across the table discussing pimples, while her old grandmother watches fondly, not understanding a word that is exchanged. Her mother serves us hot *idlis* with *sambhar* and pickle. 'I love garlic pickle,' says Padmini. 'I can finish the whole bottle but I don't... It's bad for my face. Growing up with pubescent pimples is such a normal thing... but as an actress it's such a mess. The Press writes about it... The photographers grumble. It's awful. I reached a stage when I secretly began to pray each night for a clear complexion... I know it sounds foolish but I had my little-girl dreams. Like when I went to sleep at night, I hoped a miracle would take place. I hoped that in the morning, when I looked into the mirror, a flawless complexion would smile at me... Nothing of the sort happened. When I turned absolutely desperate, Shabana and Neetu suggested Ashok Kumar to me. I went to him in great faith and God, what a difference it has made!!'

9.45 a.m.: She's late and the tension is slowly creeping up. She races down the staircase, then climbs back and says, 'Let's go by the lift. It's faster.' In the car, every second sentence of hers is, 'I'm very late' and like a 17-year-old, she sticks her tongue out all the time. Despite the tension, the drive is incomplete without her remarks on whatever catches her eye. On the fourth floor of a passing building, a husband and wife are drinking their morning tea in the balcony. She leans out of the window and says, 'Look! A happy family.' At Chandan theatre, she peeps again, reads the show timing loudly. 'It is 3:45, 7 and 9:45...' then after a second's thought adds, 'I wonder why I bother to check the timing when I know I can't make it.' A dog races across the road. She closes her eyes and covers both her ears with her hands. 'These animals have some instinct that they won't die otherwise they wouldn't be crossing like this!!'

10.00 a.m.: Seth Studio. Our car enters and instantly a group of people rush forward to greet her. The assistant silently leads her into her make-up room. As he opens the door for her, he looks at his watch and says, 'What happened to your reputation of being a punctual star?' He's bullying the girl. Padmini looks at him nervously and says, 'Am I very late?'

When he leaves the room she says, 'When one is shooting with Dilip*saab* one is psychologically prepared to be called on the sets only after 11 o'clock. Still, this is the first time I've come late. I get very tense when I'm late. Sometimes it happens due to no fault of mine, still it unnerves me completely... I guess it's my temperament. I know of so many stars who report hours late and are still so confident. I'm not like that. Also, it's different when you've joined the industry as a heroine — I came to industry as a child artiste, so my position becomes very fragile... They treat me as their *bachchi* and even after I've grown up, they don't think I have... I have to be very careful about my actions. If I do anything rash or hurt them unintentionally, they would say, 'See, success has already gone to her head!'

Her make-up man is busy getting ready for the day, setting things on the table. The icebox, a napkin, small bits of white linen, the pancake make-up. He sharpens the eyebrow pencils, cleans the mirror, opens the bottle of eyeliner and the blush-on cases. Her hairdresser Unan is talking to the spot-boy and organising tea for everybody. Padmini sets up her music equipment. The room echoes with the rhythm. Padmini stands on the carpet and wriggles, then she goes to the basin to wash her face.

She dances in the bathroom... Even just now, before sitting on the chair, she does a step or two sway to the rhythm. 'I can dance all day.' She smiles at me from the reflection. 'If I go to a disco it is not for the glamour of the place. It's because I enjoy dancing. When I dance I can feel music coming out of every pore of my body. I feel I'm touching heaven.' Unan who is preparing bleach for Padmini looks bored. She says, 'First let me apply the bleach for you, after that you can dance as much as you desire.'

Padmini looks at the lotion, scowls and says, 'N...n...no...not today.' 'What do you mean, not today?' scolds Unan. 'Would

you believe it? She has not bleached her face for months. Other actresses are so particular about these beauty aids. That's why their faces shine. Pandi is so lazy. You ask her anything, her standard answer is, 'I don't know.' Ask her where the keys have been kept and her reply is 'I don't know'. Ask her if she wants to eat fruit, once again it is, 'I don't know'. *Dada* (her make-up man) and I have nicknamed her 'I don't know.'

10.30 a.m.: The transformation from the woman to the star is purely mechanical. It's a never-ending process of threading the eyebrows, painting the fingernails, brushing the hair... *Dada* begins to paint her face... first the foundation... then the colour on the cheeks... more blush-on to hide the pimple... lip-brush to outline the lips and then a mixture of two shades... Unan brushes her hair gently and leisurely removes the knots... brushes a hundred strokes and then plaits them. When at last it's over, Unan looks gleefully in the mirror and says, 'There! Now you look like a star' Padmini stares at the reflection, makes a wry face and runs to change the cassette, once again dancing vigorously on the carpet.

11.15 a.m.: Zipping up the *kurta,* she comes out of the bathroom wearing a yellow *salwar kameez*. 'Unan, *dupatta*...!' she screams and Unan rushes to tie the *dupatta* across the waist... Unan lipstick...' she yells again. Unan drops the *dupatta* and rushes to give her the lipstick. One hand busy with the lipstick and the other raised higher to help Unan tie the dupatta, Padmini says, 'I don't want to keep them waiting for me.' The music is loud and Padmini is humming louder... dancing with it. 'What colour was my *bindi?* Red or black?' she asks her staff. 'Red' answers *Dada*. 'Black' snaps Unan. Her spot boy brings the continuity album. In the meanwhile, Padmini wears her earrings, fumbling with them and dropping the screw three times. *Dada* searches for matching bangles from the box... passes them on to Unan who pushes them onto Padmini's hands. She's putting the chain around her neck when the door opens again and the tall, fair boy with moustache walks in. 'Are you ready?' he asks strictly this time. Before he can finish his sentence, Padmini ducks under, pushes him aside, and charges to the sets.

12.30 p.m.: The film is Ravi Chopra's *Mazdoor* — The set is

that of a village *basti*... the same chawl lane full of women in *ghagra-choli* and *dhoti*-clad men holding long sticks... They are shooting a dance sequence. Suresh Bhatt is the dance director. They talk for a few minutes while he explains the scene. Aruna, Sureshji's assistant enacts the movements and Padmini immediately follows the steps. After two rehearsals, they do the final take. 'When I'm shooting a dance scene I'm less tense. In the emotional scenes one has to build up stress... Sometimes, it's difficult to emote because your co-star is not supportive. These are moments when you want to flare up and scream. But you can't. In this film I'm playing a very interesting role. Isn't it too much of a good fortune that I'm already working in two films with Dilip Kumar? Who would have dreamt of such a possibility considering the generation gap? He's a legend. It's an experience working with him. His compliments are spontaneous, not calculated. Every 'take' of his is different from the previous one, and in the final shot he does something entirely different... But he does not play games like... Forget it, I don't want to mention names... Dilip Kumar warns you that he'll be different in each take... That's his style. And wow! what a style!'

1.00 p.m.: Lunch break. Her *dabba* comes from home. As she unpacks the tiffin, Padmini says, 'I hope Mom has sent the fried prawns she promised. If I know her concern for my face, she must have changed the menu.' As predicted, the menu's changed. Curd, chapatis, *baingan ka bhaji*, fried *dal*, fish and rice. She eats her food quickly, almost gulping the rice down her throat. There's a buzz on the telephone. A certain 'Kusum *tai*' is on the line... Padmini giggles on the phone chats sitting cross-legged on the sofa playing with the telephone wire. Whenever Padmini wants to be discreet, she breaks into colloquial Marathi... When she disconnects the phone she says, 'Yesterday we had a celebration for the success of *Prem Rog*... a quiet celebration which included four families. The Kolhapures... The Kulkarnis and two other families. It was so beautiful compared to the usual *hulla gulla* scenes.'

2.00 p.m.: We are driving towards Chembur. She is doing double shift. After the new rule, producers have to take special permission if they want to shoot late. She talks about double shift rules. 'In a way it's for the better. The stars were

slave-driven. Now, on it's own a new discipline will come over the industry.' The breeze plays with her hair and she sits complacently with her eyes closed. I don't know if I'm imagining it, but the barometer of Padmini's mood has fallen ever since she went to make the particular phone call in between shots. She had returned sniffing. 'My cold is so bad, I find it difficult to breathe.' She sits dreamily, her head reclining on the back seat, pensive. It reminds me of what Shashi Kapoor had said: 'There is melancholy in every star's life...'

2.30 p.m.: R. K. Studio. She sits before the mirror and sighs for the hundredth time. 'I feel exhausted. I wish I didn't have to shoot.' The spotboy brings tea, puts the glass on the table and goes away. The costume man enters, hangs her saree on the hook and goes away, followed by the unit boy who brings her jewellery box. Producer Boney Kapoor enters a little later carrying two silk sarees. 'Which one do you prefer?' 'The one on the right,' she says looking at her friend Shama for approval. Shama is accompanying her for the afternoon shooting, since they are going out together in the evening. 'Yes... The border is pretty,' Shama agrees.

Sanjay Kapoor, comes and informs Padmini that they will be shooting the scene with the kid. 'So boring,' she says. 'I'm fed up of that *dulhan* saree.' The dialogue writer comes and explains the scene. She hears him patiently and nods 'Okay.'

3.00 p.m.: Dressing up lazily, she talks about herself. 'Most of the time I'm nice and polite to people who are nice and polite to me. But if someone acts smart or plays dirty, then God save him, because I turn nasty. Shivangi gets embarrassed when I'm harsh and undiplomatic. When I'm provoked, I cannot hold back my anger. I go absolutely wild. I was not like that. I was very docile and vulnerable once upon a time. A few years in this industry and you change. I have changed. People change you. It's the law of the jungle here. If you don't protect yourself, they'll trample upon you. Even when you are on your guard, they throw stones. Every man you speak to instantly becomes a lover. Earlier, I used to get very worked up... I would cry and spend sleepless nights worrying about it. Now, it does not matter. Slander leaves me untouched. I'm more concerned with what will happen to the relationship.'

3.30 p.m.: On the sets, director Bapu explains the scene to her. 'Has the child done her rehearsals?' she asks. The child is made to rehearse. Once... Twice... Thrice... The kid is nervous, fumbles with her lines. Padmini watches her in amusement. When it's time for the take, she directs the child gently: 'Do it like this.' The child is at ease and imitates the older woman. 'During *Ishq Ishq Ishq* I must have been her age, perhaps even younger. But I was less camera-conscious. Just now as I watched her do the scene, a hundred thoughts crossed my mind. I wonder what she's feeling... Yet when I did it myself, I felt nothing. Strange!'

4.00 p.m.: There is a change of costume. 'Thank God!' Padmini sighs. 'If I could, I would burn this saree!' In the make-up room, I tell her that out of the younger lot, she's the only one to play mother roles. 'Yes but the kid is Naseer's. I'm only his second wife and the marriage is against my wishes...' 'For a newcomer, you are doing a lot of mature roles? What kind of roles will you play five years later?

There's a pause. 'What will I do? This is what a dear friend asked me a few days ago. 'What will you do once you've finished with the cream of roles?' I don't know...I'll do something else... I'll decide when the time comes. Perhaps I may just not be working at all...I don't have to go on working forever and forever. I'll get married. Who wants to stay in the industry forever? Five years should be a fulfilling experience. I'm sure I'll feel satiated by then. No one had predicted stardom for me. My mother told me recently that a fortune-teller had said that I would be an artiste. But that wasn't surprising. Ours is a family of artistes and singers. That reminds me...'she says changing the topic. 'A certain gentleman has done a painting of how I will look when I'm old. He has done it from a current photograph, but the result is astounding. Would you believe it, I look exactly like my aunt Lata Mangeshkar. It's mind-blowing. I could not believe it was me... It's exciting to know how one will look when one has aged. It's nice growing up. I'm very excited because I'll be 18 next month. I'll be a major then. I tell my mother, 'Once I'm a major, I shall listen to no one. Let me be 18 and I'll freak out!! My mother does not take me seriously. She has become used to being threatened by her daughters. Last year, Shivangi woke up every other day,

threatening to freak out. This year it's my turn! Yesterday, in exasperation, she said, 'Okay, you freak out, only explain to me what that term means!'

5.00 p.m.: There is a grr...and the cameraman closes his camera. Immediately there is an uproar on the sets. 'Hurry!' scream a dozen voices in chorus. The cameraman looks away smiling, wiping his perspiration. It's pack-up time and there is elation everywhere. Padmini rushes out of the sets almost bumping into people. She runs from the stage to the passage to the exterior panting for breath. She enters the make-up room and starts throwing her hairpins and jewellery on the table. She sits on the chair rubbing cream all over her face to remove the make-up. 'How much I hate make-up! It's the worst part of stardom. Every morning begins with applying paint on the face... It ends with rubbing cream to wipe the paint.' An old lady enters the room without knocking. She has come to ask money for *Ganpati puja...* Her Maharashtrian beliefs are strong. Padmini cannot say no to *Ganpati.* She gives a five-rupee note and gently closes the door. Again she is dancing to the music... swinging while rubbing cream all over the face with the tissue. '*Jaldi,* she tells Unan, 'Fast...' She has no patience. She is tearing at her hair, throwing her earrings. Unan brushes her hair. 'That's enough... Just tie them into a plait. I can't wait,' Padmini tells her irritably. Unan does not react. She leisurely brushes the hair into place, and only when she is satisfied, she ties it in a plait. *Dada* cleans her face with astringent, while the spotboy hurriedly tidies the room, picks up her luggage, icebox, cassette player, the bags and loads it into the dickey of her car.

Padmini rushes to the bathroom to change, wears her heels, clutches her bag and sprays 'Rive Gauche'. Once outside when photographers try to click her she says, 'Do you want a photograph like this? I look really bad without make-up.' 'So what?' I tell her, 'You are still the most saleable star.' She smiles. 'How does it feel,' I ask her, 'To be 17 and bring home lakhs?' 'I don't get the notes in hand... And I don't count the notes,' she answers lazily. 'Still, if you ask me, then I must say it feels good... I'm having fun. About being 17, I cannot wait to be 18. I'm counting the days...'

Outside, there's a large group of fans wanting to be photographed with her. She stands nodding graciously...

smiles... signs autographs... smiles again. Finally, when she gets into her car, people start banging on the window shouting. 'Padmini Kolhapure... Padmini Kolhapure... Manorama... *Prem Rog*...' They run behind the car continuing to shout and scream... She does not look behind...

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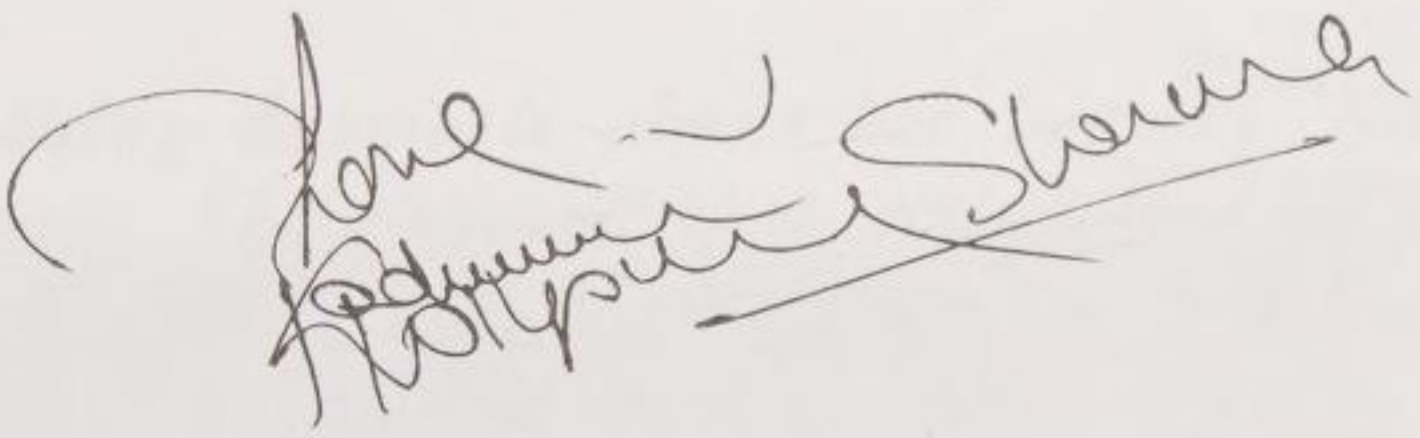
'I freaked out reading the details. Then, I was waiting to be 18 to freak out. Later, I was waiting to get married to freak out. After that, to become a mother, to freak out. Now, I'm waiting for my son to grow up to freak out. This time it's a promise, let me be 40 and I'll freak out!'



(Padmini Kolhapure-Sharma)

1982

SHABANA AZMI

Where is she? The 'Lakshmi' of Ankur. *The saffron saree... the blood red bindi... Those kaajal lined eyes. The sullen face which swelled with intensity as the camera drew closer and talent exploded on screen.*

Where is she? The wholesome girl of irrepressible spirit. She sported 'convent' snobbery, but was full of native humour. She gave spontaneous interviews — spoke of simple longings with undue passion, of getting wet in the rain... of squatting on the grass in the middle of her shooting because it looked so green, and the unconcealed hurt when she was rebuffed with, 'This is not the way a star behaves.' There was no pretence while receiving a wound then.

There was nothing dramatic about her honesty. An instinctive actress. She believed that acting was only feelings. Poured sensitivity in every shot, followed her emotions blindly and was arrogant about using glycerine.

When the woman was still not worldly, not hardened by the knocks of life. She dreamt her little girl dreams. Her ideal home, she said, was, 'A doting husband, a handsome son and lots of plants. Love is all I want. I live on love,' she whispered. Days of far-fetched romance, of untapped potential, of unknown stardom. With time came the flow of films, money, success, permissiveness, power, popularity and infinite changes...

Today...Ten years later...

The 'Shobhana' of Yeh Nazdeekiyaan *has added years, pain, wisdom, and weight. She wears mascara, is commercially coy on screen. Her face is solemn. Her performance clinical.*

She's acquired poise but is pompous. Gives boastful interviews. Announces her intense phases... Her favourite philosophies. She's cautious, sharp, unafraid and clever. There is not an unguarded moment.

The actress is more methodical, she has mastered the technique. While performing, she uses her intellect along with emotions. She understands the medium, studies performances and discusses them passionately. And she's still arrogant about using glycerine.

The woman is less spontaneous, less searching. There are compartments within her which have closed. The little girl has disappeared in a cave. Romance is something found only in story books. 'I want a baby but not now. I'm not yet prepared for motherhood.'

Ten years have taken their toll on the woman.

'Why are you so superior in your interviews?' I ask her while discussing a recently published article. 'What do you mean?' she snarls back offended. 'She's confused!' analyses Mahesh Bhatt, her dear friend and close confidant. 'But then Shabana is not Shabana without her confusion and passion!'In her room, at Rock Castle Hotel in Hyderabad, where she's shooting for Shyam Benegal's new film, Shabana rests on the bed in an orange kaftan, tired after a hard day's work. Her index finger resting on her temple, she listens to the allegations... Opinions.

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In the past, your interviews were forthright and honest. Now all you do is sell your opinions and get impatient and harsh when people don't buy them.

Not all interviews are given seriously. And most of the time I'm being asked the same questions. Why should I give stimulating replies when journalists don't bother to ask stimulating questions. I don't treat every interview with caution. Sometimes, I really get bored talking about myself and so I give answers just for a lark, or merely to shock a gullible journalist, depending on my frame of mind. It would be a lot more interesting if the journalists understood the attitude behind the answers, rather than the answer *per se*. However, if a person seriously wants an in-depth interview, then I do answer seriously. Because that gives me a chance to analyse myself as well.

Okay, let's analyse your performance. A certain complacency seems to have crept into your work of late. Have you become overconfident, or have you lost your earlier enthusiasm?

I'll try and answer this question without getting defensive, but first point out specific instances where I've been complacent.

In Yeh Nazdeekiyaan, *the character was underplayed. That special Shabana intensity was missing.*
That's not true. I was very excited about the film and I'm totally satisfied with my performance. Even today, I believe in the character I played and my interpretation of it was exactly like the director, Vinod Pandey. There have been varying reactions to my performance, almost all of them positive, particularly the audience response. However, I must admit that some of my friends, whose opinions I value, said that it was a clinically competent performance, with the real me missing. I wonder how that happened. I can assure you that it didn't happen because of any lack of sincerity on my part.

And Shama. *Even a layman could see that you were hamming your way through the film. Aren't you embarrassed by a fake performance like that?*
You've to understand a role in the context of the genre of the film you are making, because a role doesn't exist by itself. *Shama* was a one-dimensional film. The character I played was as good as gold and I think the film clicked, because I played the role that way. Had I played the role more realistically, it would have disturbed the film. When you do a commercial film, a scene in it should be intense only within its own graph. Otherwise, the scene becomes out of place. The question of complacency arises, only when an actor thinks he or she has achieved all there is to achieve. I haven't reached that stage. In fact, I've repeatedly said that in our industry one gets patted on the back too soon, and too much is made of too little. As an actress, I do not feel that enough demands have been made on my talent. The film I'm currently doing with Shyam Benegal is interesting. My character Rukmini Bai is a larger than life character, who fantasizes to an extent that she can no longer separate the fact from fiction. Moreover, it's challenging because it's a comedy, not a farce. It's very difficult to resist the temptation to horse around. Even in the most complex of situations, one must perform with bravura rather than bravado.

She looks at me with sleepy eyes, yawns in between sentences. 'I would like to put off the interview till tomorrow morning', she says, and gets up to fetch some water from the adjoining room where her hairdresser Bela

is sleeping. 'Every night, I disturb the poor woman, squeaking the door to get the water.

Morning. She wakes up complaining of bodyache. Exercising her arms, she says, 'My mother tells me I don't know how to sleep... My father is like that too. Every morning he wakes up massaging his fingers. My mother is fed up of us. She says: 'What do I do with the two of you?' Last night, I had a strange dream... I can't remember it clearly now, but it involved some house. I knock on the door and say something, I don't know what. One of the recurring dreams I'm troubled by is of examinations... I've to answer the Geography paper the next day, and I'm not prepared. Another dream which comes back vividly is of getting stuck in the elevator. Whenever I enter a building which requires me to use the elevator, I'm frightened. To the person with me, I say so. Both of us smile, and for a while, the fear is lessened. Most people are self-conscious inside an elevator and stare at the fleeting numbers....' She orders a cup of tea and we resume the interview we left incomplete the previous day.

Farooque Shaikh says that while you project strong characters with great conviction, it's hard to imagine you in a role that requires you to be vulnerable or helpless, because that's the kind of person you refuse to be in real life. Do you agree?

I think being vulnerable and helpless are two different things. I'm vulnerable but very rarely helpless. Maybe it's true that I do stronger roles with greater conviction, because I'm closer to such characters. But as an actress I want to do every kind of role. I don't want to turn into a Faye Dunaway, who's a victim of her own image. I accept that helpless women exist and they are sometimes attractive on screen. But I want to make the choice of not projecting such women because enough harm has been done through them already. However, if a character has a graph of being helpless, of suffering and then reaching a new understanding, it's different. Then, I will gladly play such roles.' Actually acting comes easily to me. But because it comes easily, I feel it's not real. And in the next shot, I tell myself, come on Shabana, try a little harder. It cannot be so easy after all...

Inspite of all the acclaim and awards, you are still far

away from the top banners. Do you feel deprived of the power you'd like to enjoy?

The term power is relative. It has different meanings for different people, depending on what a person wants. My power lies in my being recognised as an actress of merit. I am rarely considered for a typical hero-oriented story where the heroine has little to do. But I've had my fill of these roles too. Haven't I worked with the biggest of banners like Manmohan Desai, B. R. Chopra and Prakash Mehra? At a point when the banners were more important, I worked with them. But it didn't do me any good. My fans' grouse was not against my switching over to a commercial set up. They were against tolerating me in inconsequential roles. Mercifully, I realised it in good time. Today, I fetch a good price because I can be considered without hesitation for a heroine-oriented film, not because I'm working in an A,B, or C set up, but because distributors accept me as easily in a film like *Ashanti* as in a film like *Shama*. Power to me means carrying off a film on my own steam rather than being a hero's appendage. Isn't that where I set out to be when I first came?

Somebody like Anil Kapoor, whom you have been encouraging until yesterday, has moved ahead working with top banners?

How do you expect me to react to this question? Do you expect me to disguise myself and start competing with all the young boys? I hate this label of a godmother. I am nobody's godmother. It is a totally different thing to be supportive of someone. I do it because I see a certain spark in a person. My reaction is personal, not professional. I have never got anybody a single role or a film.

Colleagues like Vinod Pande and Boney Kapoor whom you claim to be your friends and who you have been supportive of, haven't repeated you in their films. How come?

It's not always possible for me to be in every film made by a friend. And if the people you mention haven't repeated me, doesn't it prove that I don't force myself down people's throats?

If you hadn't spilt with 'Filmwalas', you would be working in Kalyug, Vijeta ***and other films produced by Shashi Kapoor. Hasn't your loss been Rekha's gain?***

No comments.

Next day. At the location, in the costume section, Shabana is sitting in the outer room, applying make-up. Smita Patil is in the inner room, painting her nails. The vibes are cold, but they are civil. They greet each other only when the eyes meet. Exchange a few words, but there is no warmth. They lead their own lives, do their scenes without interference. Still the irony of it all is that in the film, the two girls are required to feel very affectionate towards each other. Will they manage? I wonder. Shabana who plays the older woman has to play overprotective towards Smita. During the lunch break, I see the film's stills and react warmly. I change my opinion. Here are two professional artistes emoting for the camera. Two actresses who could have had a lot in common if the industry had not brewed so many controversies and turned them into rivals. I'm reminded of the next question I have to ask.

According to Smita, the role of Libaas ***was specially written for her. How did you get into the project? Is it because of your special relationship with Gulzar?***

This is an insult to both me and Gulzar. Even if I am a worm and get roles only by sweet-talking and by striking relationships with people, surely you credit Gulzar*saab* with a little more integrity! Would he sacrifice his film for flattery? The idea of *Libaas* was narrated to me when I was shooting for *Namkeen* in Manali. Initially, there were some hassles about the price, but Gulzar*saab* told the producer that he'd rather drop the film altogether than consider anybody else for the role. Why don't you ask him about it?

Has your friendship with Zeenat Aman cooled off because you are upset about her breaking off with old friend Kuku (Kanwaljeet)?

It's true that my relationship with Zeenat was enhanced because of Kuku. But it's not true that I'm avoiding Zeenat because of her split with Kuku. In fact, a month after their spilt, when Kuku and I were shooting together, the three of us had lunch together. With our kind of schedules, it's difficult to keep track of one's colleagues unless one is working together. After *Ashanti*, Zeenat and I are not doing any films together. I wish her well and I'm sure she feels the same way about me. All this talk of Kuku having a nervous breakdown because of their split is a lie. He was in the hospital recovering from overexertion.

We ramble...A little about her profession, a little about the person. In between she goes to give her shot and we miss the cue to our conversation. When she returns, she re-reads my questionnaire and says, 'do you think this interview will ever get over?' Satyadev Dubey comes with the dialogue sheet and reads out the scene to her. She listens attentively, rehearses her lines and then in the middle of the sentence, starts smiling...She talks of the special phone call last night...giggles while imitating him. Even though the friend is not with us, he is there in her conversation, her references. He is a strong source of influence on her. In her attitude and humour, his contribution is apparent. Effortlessly, Shabana succumbs to this change. 'In the past she was never like this,' says a family friend. 'Even in her deepest involvement, Shabana's personality remained unfazed. But this time it's different.' There are too many opinions. Too many versions. Some even say that Shabana's feminist views come from him because he's the kind of man who believes in treating women as his equal. I ask her about this dichotomy.

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Which of the two women you project is real? The one who wants to lean, or the one who wants to be self-sufficient?
People are so quick to form opinions about other people. They want to put them into archetypal slots. It's easier to understand them through images and finally, easier to relate to them. Whenever there is a change, there is confusion. People don't know how to handle changes. I agree that many years ago, I had said that I wanted to be an extension of my husband's personality. I believed in it then. Today, I don't... If the change had been gradual, then it would be less annoying to those around me, but now when I talk of women's rights, women's equality, it's unsetling for them.

Isn't it foolish to deny your relationship with Javed Akhtar, when the two of you are seen openly everywhere? Can you deny that for the past one year he has often visited you on your outdoor locations on the pretext of writing a script?
'I'm not denying anything. I am merely choosing not to give any explanations.

Everybody says that Salim and Javed have spilt because of you. Is this true?

Tell me what did I lose when they were together and what is my gain now? Anyone who knows Javed, even vaguely, will agree that he does not allow any interference in his decisions. To this date, I have no inkling of the real reason for their split except for what I have read in the magazines.

Javed has gone on record that he respects your talent as an actress. So what's stopping the two of you from working together? Is it because you don't want to promote each other?

Javed and I will be tremendous together, in a working relationship. There's no question of either of us promoting the other, for both of us are too secure and established in our lives and careers to need any patronising. I certainly believe that he's the best writer we have. But, for us to work together, it's important that the sensibility of the film matches the highest in him and the highest in me. When such a script comes along, I promise you, not only my role but the entire film will be different, meaningful, and conscious.

In a recent interview you've stated that at 30, you discovered that your roots are Muslim. So where do your broad-minded views fit in with the concept of 'talaaq' and second marriage?

A few months ago I visited my home town, Azamgarh. There I realised that deep down I'm very Muslim... I like Muslim food... I am impressed with well-spoken Aligarhi language. Or small things like a person saying *shukriya* when he accepts a *paan* from me. They thrill me. When I talk of my Muslim roots, I don't mean it in the religious or cultural sense. If I observe *roza* in the month of *Ramzan,* it's not because I believe in rituals. I don't. I am not at all religious. It happens with me instinctively. Let me give you an incident. The husband of a well-known poetess told me something which I've not been able to forget. It's a simple theory, but it affected me strangely. Maybe because in that particular phase, I was subconsciously looking for such an identity... He said, 'The duty of every parent is to teach their children their mother tongue, and tell them a few mythological tales. Then, even if you take the child away from his birthplace, the child will automatically catch up

with his culture. The duration of his exile does not matter. When I get married, I'd like to include the clause of *Qulla* in my *nikaahnama. Qulla* is a right granted to the woman to divorce her man if she chooses to. I would also like to have a registered marriage to further safeguard my other rights. It sounds negative that I should think of all these clauses even before I get married. Not because I feel threatened that my man might leave me. In fact, the thought that another woman can come into the picture when I'm there is appalling. My grouse is against unequal rights.

Will you be getting married in the near future?
No, not in the near future.

Don't you want to have babies?
I do... but there's no longing in me to have one immediately.

She flops down on the sofa. Stretches her legs and tucks a pillow under her head, indicating she cannot continue the conversation any longer. A furrow appears between her eyebrows, and one knows instantly that her mood has changed. She lazily taps her feet on the wall. We are surrounded with activity... Noise. Somebody is humming a song. A friend is sitting beside us smoking. She takes long puffs on her cigarette and inhales deeply. There's no ashtray in the room. She stubs the cigarette on the floor. Shabana watches her and remarks, 'It has always amazed me how the cigarette refuses to be extinguished until the last moment... It fights for life until you stub it. The survival instinct is strong in human beings, but to think that even a cigarette should have it!'

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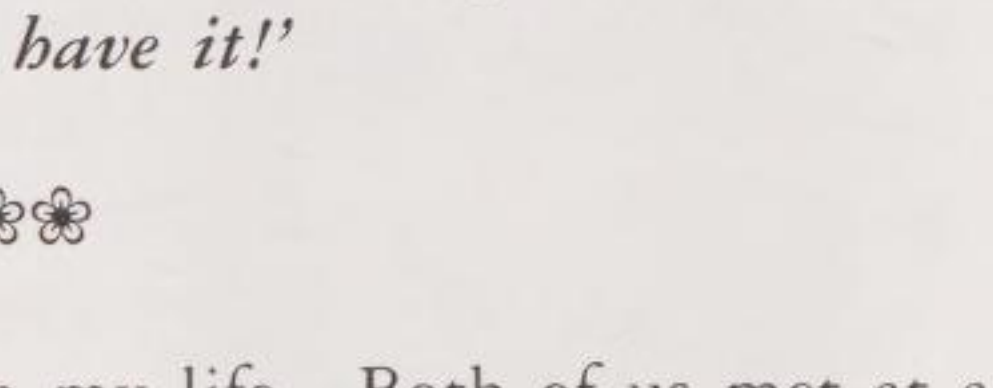
'Javed was a turning point in my life. Both of us met at a time when we were searching for our roots. Friends would remark that we were so perfect for each other in terms of our backgrounds, that we should have ideally had an arranged marriage.'



(Shabana Azmi)

1983

POONAM-PADMINI-
ANITA-RATI

They're all in their early twenties, but economically independent. They're rich, famous, and important, bread winners of their families. They earn ten times more than what girls of their age do. On the sets, even if they are the youngest, they are the first to be offered chairs, first to be served coffee...

Does all this adulation cripple a star's normal growth? Does the eternal pampering turn them into self-centred and demanding viragos? What sort of life do these actresses lead at home? Are star parents also in awe of their celebrity children? Are they treated differently from other siblings in the family? Or are they equally answerable for their misbehaviour and excessive spending? Who decides on their investments? Who decides on what films they accept or reject? We interview four bachelor actressess — Poonam Dhillon, Padmini Kolhapure, Anita Raaj, Rati Agnihotri — about their lifestyles...

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Do you have an independent room or do you share your bedroom? Do you feel you need a more luxurious room now that you've become a star?

Poonam: Even as children all of us grew up sleeping in independent bedrooms. Occasionally, my sister and I'd get into the mood and shack up but to do this every day would be impractical and inconvenient for both of us. I don't think I deserve a luxurious bedroom just because I've become a star. But my parents did nag me about living like a refugee and forced me into getting my room done up lavishly. And now that the room is ready, I must confess, it's very relaxing to return to it after a tiring day's work in the studios.

Padmini: Before Shivangi got married, we used to share a room for years. I don't find sharing a room inconvenient at all. After all, I'm not sharing it with any Tom, Dick or Harry. In fact I'd prefer it if my younger sister slept in my room, but she's too young...She's only 10 and prefers to sleep with Mummy. I don't possess a luxurious bedroom. In fact, everything in the new bungalow is at the moment just functional. We're still in the process of doing it up.

Anita: Yes, I share my room with my sister. On outdoor

locations, I have my mother with me. And when I'm married I'll have my husband... I'm too frightened to be left all by myself. My bedroom is comfortable. I don't believe in habituating myself to real luxuries. So often, depending on the unit one is shooting with, an actress is thrown into all kinds of uncomfortable situations. I like to remain flexible.

Rati: I don't have anyone staying over here to share my room with me. My sisiter lives abroad and my brother lives in Delhi. My room looks nice — it looks the way I like it to look. For the new house that I purchased in Juhu, maybe I'll do up my bedroom in a completely different way.

Are you normally in a good mood when you wake up? Do you drink tea in your room or do you have it outside with the family?

Poonam: Yes, most of the time I'm peppy, unless something depressing occurs. Then suddenly, I feel very low and feel physically so weak that I can barely function. I don't drink tea. When I wake up I walk out of the room with my eyes half-closed, collect the newspaper, hunt for my glasses and run to the potty.

Padmini: I wake up and immediately rush for my bath. There's nothing definite about my morning tea. I have it anywhere. If I have a holiday, I laze in my bed until it is absolutely essential to wake up, then I take my glass of tea and rush to my terrace. There, I spend a lazy time sipping my tea leisurely. My terrace feels like paradise.

Anita: If I have seen a nice face or heard a nice voice, I'm in good mood. However, most of the time, the first thing I see are my own hands — so, usually, I'm in an awful mood. I don't drink tea. I drink a tall glass of hot milk... I gulp it down hurriedly before I leave for shooting.

Rati: I'm in a rather quiet frame of mind in the mornings... sort of normal mood. I like to be left alone until I get my bearings. I cannot wake up without my bed tea. Every morning my servant wakes me up with my morning tea. I open the door for him and jump back into the bed. After 10 minutes when the tea is lukewarm, I drink it lazily and once again snuggle into my pillow. It takes me minimum half an hour to actually wake up.

Do you get upset if your breakfast is not ready on time? Do you expect the servants to be absolutely at your service until you leave for shootings?

Poonam: It is seldom that my breakfast is not ready on time. On the contrary, it's always me who is late. So by the time I get down to eat, it's usually cold, and my servant is upset with me because I did not eat it hot. Serving me breakfast normally entails following me from one room to another — I'm always late and always in a hurry. Servants of the house are at everyone's service, not just mine. Reshma, my younger sister, leaves for college at 8 a.m. So till she leaves she gets her share of exclusive attention. I leave home at 9.30, so next it's my turn. After that, my parents have them at their service for the entire day.

Padmini: Yes...but I don't make it apparent that I'm upset. I merely sit and tap my feet. Actually, I get very tense when I'm late and all I say is I'm late...very late. No, I don't expect the servants of the house to be exclusively at my service.

Anita: I don't eat breakfast. Most of the time I'm on a strict diet. I don't expect the servants to be at my service. I'm capable of taking care of myself. I find it easier to open the fridge, eat an apple, rather than ask for breakfast.

Rati: I eat my breakfast at 10 o'clock — by which time I'm always in the studios. I eat whatever the unit gives me. I'm not very fussy. At home I merely drink juice and milk. On holidays, when I'm at home, my food is always ready on time. Our servants are so well-trained, that there are absolutely no complaints.

Is it essential that an actress be escorted for shootings and outdoors?

Poonam: It's nice to have company. The escort does not mean a chaperone to guard you from worldly evils, but it's nice to have someone you could talk to and keep unwanted people away from you.

Padmini: Yes, at least during the first stage it's necessary. Once you're established and confident about looking after yourself, I guess it's okay.

Anita: Yes, personally, I don't say that I can't look after myself or I cannot manage on my own. However, I prefer it

when Mom comes along. After a difficult shot when I return to the make-up room, it's nice to find Mom in the room.

Rati: It depends entirely on the artiste. Some might not find it an intrusion in their normal functioning. I like having company — especially on my outdoors.

Do you feel that even parents' attitudes change when their offspring becomes a star? Have you seen any changes in them even if it is in small gestures. Has your own attitude changed towards them over the years?

Poonam: When I joined films, Dad said, 'It's your life. You live the way you like it.' My mother was so furious and hurt with me that she did not speak to me for three years. She was even angry with Papa for not putting his foot down. When I bought this flat and coaxed them to visit me, Mummy refused point-blank. I had to almost plead with her to visit me at least once. Even when they came down, it wasn't easy to convince them about my lifestyle. They were sceptical, untrusting. It was traumatic. Finally, I took my mother with me on an outdoor to Madras. That's when she first realised that film folk are not a disreputable, degenerative species.

Padmini: I think I'm the same towards them. Maybe, sometimes, I cause them pain but it isn't intentional. Also, I'm more independent now. Actually, right from childhood, all of us were treated like individuals. Our opinions were heeded. Similarly, all of us got our share of pampering.

Anita: In small things maybe their thinking has changed. They become very concerned when I tell them I'm going out alone — even if I'm going to my saloon or to the health club. They insist I ring up once I reach the place. They're not wrong in feeling overprotective. After all, sometimes people do misbehave when they see a girl all alone — especially so if she's an actress.

Rati: I don't think there has been a drastic metamorphosis. Minor changes are normal and accepted, both in them as well as in me. For instance, earlier there was my brother, my sister. Now with both of them married, my parents' attention is bound to be centred around me. This isn't because I'm a star. It's circumstances, right? Again, even in those days when I was not a star I always got my way with

them. Both my brother and sister were not half as lucky as I was. Similarly, I've changed too. I became an actress when I was 17. Within a year I was a different person, as if I had matured overnight. Today, I feel my focus has changed. Earlier, I used to loaf around aimlessly, because that was my way of spending a holiday. Now, when I'm free I prefer being at home watching a film.

Is the menu at home decided with your approval?
Poonam: I'm not very fussy about food. I love home food and can eat anything. I prefer being a vegetarian. My family knows all this. On Sundays, they normally prepare what I like to eat.

Padmini: They know what I like and I get it without asking for it. Occasionally when I ask for very spicy food, I get that too with a few *gaalis*.

Anita: No. Never. The kitchen is my mother's domain. She rules there alone without interference.

Rati: When I have my morning tea, my servant asks me what I want to have for lunch as well as for dinner. Since I eat lunch on locations, my father decides the menu. For dinner, I've more or less told them what I desire to eat. Actually, whenever I've told them that I want to eat a special dish, it so happens that I normally eat out. Hence, to avoid problems, I prefer avoiding special menus. Besides, whenever I ask for a special dish they make it for me in a few minutes. Cooking isn't all that complicated.

Is your room orderly and tidy when you return from work? Does disorganisation in your daily paraphernalia upset you?
Poonam: Yes. My sister calls my room 'Fariyas Hotel'. She says I've to merely call and ask for room service and everything will be done for me in a jiffy. Disorganisation, if caused by me, does not upset me. It's organisation created by a third person in my room for my convenience which unsettles me. I get disorganised by their organisation.

Padmini: My room is like me. It goes on and off. Sometimes it's very tidy. Sometimes it's very untidy. Sometimes I purposely throw things topsy turvy.

Anita: Everything is spick and span. My sister is very fastidious and is forever cleaning the room. So often, when I've messed up my room during my photo session, I work hard to tidy it up but she always finds it imperfect. Now, I don't even bother trying to tidy it.

Rati: It has to be clean. Every morning I leave my room in a mess but my servant Shyam comes like an angel and puts everything back in the right place. I'm too pampered to do these small things myself. However, it isn't that I can't look after myself. Recently, while holidaying in Singapore, my sister and I were staying with a friend and every morning we took turns to make the room tidy.

Who does your regular personal shopping for you? How often do you clean your wardrobe and who does it for you?

Poonam: I go abroad once or twice in a year and the shopping suffices for the next 12 months. Personally, I'd like to shop in the small bylanes and the footpaths because from the car window the small shops always look very interesting. However, to roam in the small shops is not practical. After a week or a fortnight, my cupboards appear suddenly very clean. My mother has cleared them up for me in my absence. After that she spends one hour explaining to me what is kept where.

Padmini: When I go abroad I shop excessively. In Bombay, I cannot remember when I went shopping last. Maybe it was eight months ago. I've no patience to shop. I like to enter one shop and buy everything I need unless I'm shopping for shoes. Shoes are my weakness. I clean my wardrobe when I'm not shooting. Earlier, Shivangi used to clean it for me. But now I've improved a lot. And it's indeed better because this way I know exactly what is kept where.

Anita: My sister shops for me because she has a better choice. She knows exactly what I'd like or dislike, and I rely on her completely. My sister cleans the wardrobe too. She doesn't trust me.

Rati: I buy a large bulk of clothes on my trips abroad and I survive. Earlier, I used to love rummaging in shops with my friends. But after joining films, my friends hate me accompanying them. 'Everyone is staring at you...' they

complain. It's strange but I'm never conscious that somebody's staring at me, and I don't mean to sound a hypocrite.

How important is money to you? Are you embarrassed talking about payments to your producers?

Poonam: It's important, but I'd rather have less money and more peace of mind. I've come to this conclusion that as long as you have enough comforts and a few luxuries it does not matter whether the aggregate is 10 crores or 20 crores. After all the utility is the same. I don't talk about my payments. My father does. But even if I have to, I'm not unduly embarrassed. I do it as part of my job.

Padmini: It is important. I'm awfully embarrassed talking about my payments. I don't talk payment with my producers.

Anita: It is important. But not more than being human. I don't talk to my producers. Either my dad or my secretary talks to my producers.

Rati: It is important. I don't talk to my producers. My secretary talks to them. However, I don't think it should be embarrassing to talk, because, after all, if I'm working and fulfilling a commitment I would expect my producer to fulfill his commitment.

How much do your parents interfere in your money matters? Are you answerable to them for excess expenditure? Do you get pocket money or do you spend as much as you want?

Poonam: I take as much money as I want, or require. Most of the time I don't return the borrowed money I haven't used. I call this saving my black money. From this black money I buy birthday presents for friends and family. After all I can't borrow money from them and then buy presents for them!

Padmini: I give them everything, then I take from them as and when I need the money. I'm answerable to them for certain expenditures, but the final decision is mine.

Anita: I don't deal with money at all. I don't take pocket money. I seldom do any personal shopping.

Rati: I can spend as much as I want. It's entirely up to me, I may even do a film for free. I'm not answerable. My price is not the paramount thing.

How tolerant is your family to your temper tantrums? Are you allowed to shut your bedroom door and stay inside for hours?

Poonam: I'm not only allowed but it is appreciated immensely if during such moods I stay inside my room. I have a contagious temper and have a way of annoying everybody when I'm bugged with myself. Hence the minute they see me in a foul mood they would prefer it if I shut my room and relax for a while.

Padmini: Nobody does such things in the family. Actually I'm not a terribly ill-tempered girl. Even when I'm very angry, I cannot scream or show that I'm angry.

Anita: When I'm very angry I prefer to talk it out with somebody... like my mother. If it's something that nobody can help me with, I prefer to be left alone. My temper cools off in exactly two minutes. I've never shouted, screamed or banged doors.

Rati: I don't do anything so violent. I lock my room and stay inside till I've gotten control over myself.

What is style according to you? Do you think you have style?

Poonam: I admire somebody who is casually comfortable and yet looks attractive. Say like crumpled cotton saris, Kolhapuri *chappals* or faded jeans and cotton shirts. I feel I'm too lazy to acquire style. I want to wear faded jeans but I'm not confident if I'd be able to carry it off comfortably.

Padmini: To me style is sophistication. And I think I can look very sophisticated when I want to.

Anita: To me style is simplicity. I feel it requires a lot of confidence to dress up plain and simple. I'm not stylish. I'm not simple either. I'm well-groomed and too lazy. The only time I feel stylish is when I wear my sunglasses — then suddenly I feel very glamorous.

Rati: The finesse and polish in a person's conduct, his

mannerisms, his personality and his behaviour is what gives him style. Oh, yes, I do think I have immense style.

In your solemn, depressed moods do you feel that your other friends are better off than you? That life would have been easier just being married with children? Do you think of marriage, children? Do you regret stardom?

Poonam: At times I do wonder that if I hadn't joined films I'd be a more secure, less complex human being. I'd be a normal Punjabi wife and someone would take responsibility for me. But this is all conjecture. I'm not certain if I'm temperamentally suited to live life so complacently. I don't regret stardom. In fact, now that I'm in it, I feel it's difficult to give it up.

Padmini: There are depressing moods when I want to merely sit and sulk. When I get very distressed I want to scream. It is not that I'll never get married. I will when the time comes. Just now, however, I don't want to give up acting even if it brings so many tensions with it.

Anita: There are often such low moments. During such times I still think of my school friend in Delhi. Sometimes I write to her or just speak to her on the phone. When I was 15, I used to fantasize about marriage. Now suddenly, I've stopped thinking about it. But I love babies. So I have decided I'll continue to work for 15 years and adopt my sister's children.

Rati: I feel low but I'm sure that every profession has its own traumas. Even housewives could have severe domestic problems. I don't think of marriage. It does not fit into my plans for the near future. I love babies but I'll have them when I have more time.

Who has the final say in your accepting or rejecting a film? Are you allowed to give immediate dates or reduce your price while working in a friend's film?

Poonam: Me. And I do it for various reasons and at various times. My parents are not as involved in my career, to countermand my decisions. My father is a very kind human being. My father feels any producer who speaks to him in a polite tone, is a good producer and sincerely believes that he'll make the best film. My secretary handles my dates. She

does not decide what films I must do or not do. I'm open to suggestions from friends and family.

Padmini: I, and only I decide. I listen to the story and sit for a script reading. I take into consideration my role, my director and the entire project. If I have free dates, I make concessions for a friend.

Anita: I hear the script. Then later in the day I talk it over with my secretary and my father. I consult them and most of the time take action according to their advice. I'm open to reducing my price but the project should be worth it.

Rati: I have the final say but my entire family contributes their valuable opinions. I'm allowed to help a dear friend or a worthy director. As I said earlier, my price is not the ultimate consideration. It's flexible according to the project. Many other reasons contribute to my rejecting a film. I can do a film for free too. It's entirely my decision.

Are major investments like buying a plot of land or an expensive piece of jewellery made after consultation with you?

Poonam: We have what we call the family *panchayat*. Everyone flashes ideas, there's disagreement and finally we come to a concrete decision. Most of the time all of us agree on the same things.

Padmini: If it's my parents' idea they talk it over with me when I return from shooting. If it's my idea, I discuss it with both my parents and sister. We chew over the idea for a few weeks and then plunge into a decision.

Anita: Everyone assembles in the drawing room and the discussion is carried on for hours. I don't have much to say. I rely on their decisions. I cannot decide on my own. I'm too young for such things.

Rati: Whatever has to be decided, the three of us sit together and sort it out. There is often disagreement. For instance, I don't believe in buying too much jewellery. It has no resale value. I personally would prefer investing my money in real estate because the estate prices never drop. Like I'm extremely excited about my new house in Janki Kutir.

Do you think it's all right to flirt with your co-star as long as both of you know that you're only flirting and there is no serious involvements?

Poonam: My definition of flirting might be very different from another person's. In an industry like ours, even joking and playing the fool is considered dangerous. I'm not comfortable flirting with my heroes,. I'd much rather be pals with them. Most of my heroes call me a vegetarian heroine. Maybe they are right. I think I click better with girls.

Padmini: I think it's alright if both of us know that it is healthy flirting. And actions or thoughts are not misunderstood.

Anita: I don't think there is anything wrong. In fact, now that you have mentioned it I think I should have started flirting earlier. Who knows that way I'd have been the leader and my colleagues would be left far behind.

Rati: I'm very friendly but I don't think I'm a flirt. I'm not the kind of heroine who runs to her make-up room after every shot. Once I enter the set, I leave it only after pack-up. I enjoy talking but I don't encourage healthy or unhealthy flirtation. Either I'm completey involved with the man or I'm a normal friend. There is no middle path.

What is your normal routine on a Sunday? Do you feel guilty when you spend your holidays with friends and not with your family?

Poonam: In my earlier days of stardom, Sundays used to be traumatic because of the eternal conflict within me. Now somehow I'm not as edgy. As long as I'm at home I'm with the family. Sometimes, I go to see my friends. Sometimes my friends come over. Sunday does not have a fixed routine.

Padmini: I don't feel guilty at all. When I'm at home I'm talking to them all the time or maybe we're not talking but just watching a film. On Sundays, I like to laze around till noon. In the evenings I have a big gang of friends and we go to Prithvi for Irish coffee. These days, Prithvi Cafe is the hallmark of my Sundays.

Anita: I do nothing except going to the health club and watching television in the evenings. On Sundays, I miss not

having a boyfriend. I think it would be exciting going out on dates.

Rati: I don't like sleeping late on Sundays. I feel it's my only holiday, so I must make the most of it. By 8 a.m. I have bathed, had a hair wash and I'm busy planning my holiday. Every Sunday is a different experience. Sometimes I drive out of town. Sometimes I visit relatives. Sometimes I visit friends. I don't feel guilty about spending time with friends. I feel I give adequate time to my parents too. These days my Sunday obsession is my new house. I reach my empty flat by 10 a.m. and keep dreaming of all the gorgeous things I'll do to make it a paradise.

Are you aware of the salaries your servants are paid at home?

Poonam: More or less, though I cannot say that I'm aware all the time what's happening.

Padmini: Yes. I'm aware.

Anita: No, please. I know nothing of the sort.

Rati: Not exactly. The servants at home have an account with Dad. My father is their bank. So when they withdraw they always collect money in a lump sum. I've never felt curious enough to ask their actual salaries.

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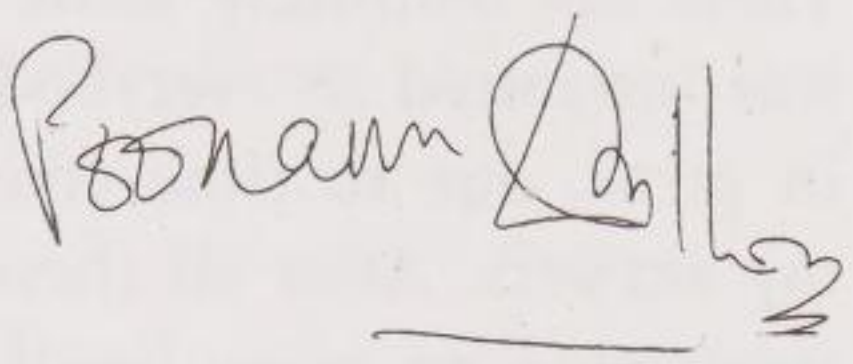
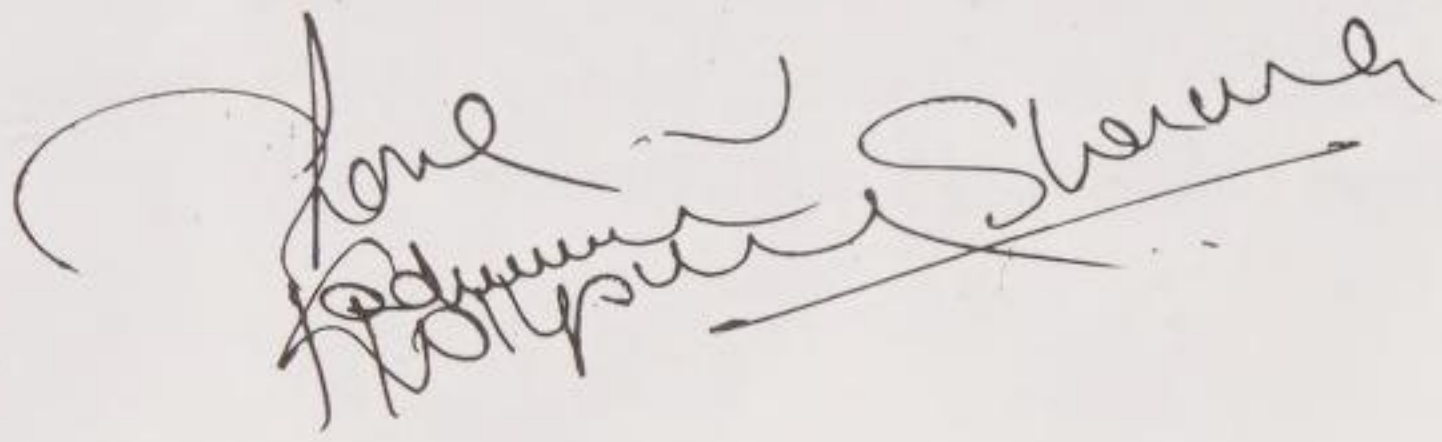
'One realised that one hasn't changed all that much. The priorities may have changed, but not the attitude. How refreshing to be asked questions about pocket money, bath and breakfast. Magazines don't delve on subjects like these anymore. Morals have undergone a tremendous change. Ours was truly an age of innocence. Rati, Padmini, Anita and I were 15 years ago as young or old as the current crop of stars. Still, we didn't run down our colleagues, the way they do it now. Our rivalry was more healthy and less vicious. There was a bonding of sorts and the fact that we are in touch after retirement, proves it. We talk on the phone about servant problems, and meet off and on at our children's birthday parties. Would we have been able to do this if we had attacked each other in print? The star system

has changed so much in the interim. And so has film journalism.'



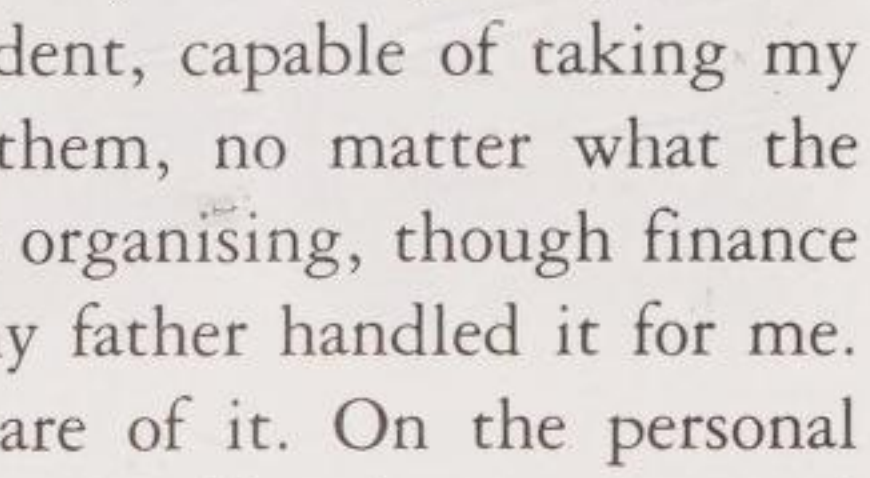
(Poonam Dhillon)

'We all sound so innocent and outdated. Even the questions are innocent. The current trend in journalism is so aggressive. The interview is indicative of nouveau stardom. Today, everything is so bold and brazen. Nobody seems to experience or speak anything ordinary and simple. All of us — Poonam, Rati, Anita and me sound so down-to-earth.'



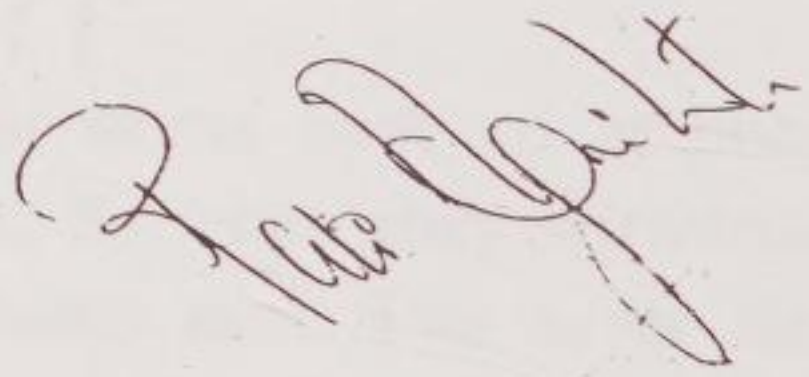
(Padmini Kolhapure-Sharma)

'I sound sheltered and over protected, not completely sure of myself. Today, I'm more independent, capable of taking my own decisions and standing by them, no matter what the consequences. I'm much better at organising, though finance is still my weak point. Earlier, my father handled it for me. Now, my husband Sunil takes care of it. On the personal front, I've matured. I'm a mother myself and so understand all that my mother did for me. I'm trying to inculcate the same values in my child. Life has been kind to me and growing up has been a beautiful experience.'



(Anita Raj)

"Considering the interview was done 15 years ago, I'm surprised how sensibly all of us have spoken. It's reassuring that one hasn't changed all that much in the years gone by. There are definitely some differences. For instance, today, I was interested in everybody's answers. When this first came in print, due to time constraints, I remember reading only my answers. After all these years, to read the old quotes was interesting on many levels. It could be the story of any four girls on the brink of a career — not necessarily actresses or stars. Considering we were rivals, there is no backbiting, or bad-mouthing. My husband was rather impressed and felt proud of my answers. It's a good feeling because Anil wasn't a part of my life at that time and this has given him a peep into my past. I think our answers and the tone of the interview reflect a certain era. Compared to today's standards, we were definitely old-fashioned. It isn't as if competition didn't exist then, but we never stepped on each other's toes. We may not have been friends but we were certainly not enemies. In fact, today, because our priorities have changed, we are friendlier."



(Rati Agnihotri)

1983

JACKIE-ANIL-MOHNISH-SUNNY-KUNAL-RAJIV

The new breed of heroes have fewer hang-ups, complexes and hangers-on. Their secretaries don't surround them like walls. Four out of the six stars (Mohnish Behl, Sunny Deol, Kunal Goswami and Rajiv Kapoor) have never known what it is to struggle. Jackie Shroff and Anil Kapoor did. The star sons have always had chauffeurs to drive them, air-conditioners to cool their rooms and chicken for their meals. They've never known what hardship meant like their fathers. Like Manoj Kumar, who slept on pavements and lived on leftovers till he could make enough money to scrape together a living. Like Dilip Kumar, whose father lost all his money, and who was reduced to selling fruits outside Crawford Market. Like Raj Kapoor, son of a great actor but who had to make a name for himself. Or even like Amitabh Bachchan, who slept on the Marine Drive walls and fought insult and humiliation to become the biggest star of Hindi films.

But if adversity has not tested them, privilege has preserved their optimism. Their dreams are simple. Their problems, even simpler. Perhaps, as success catches on they will change. And slowly, become like the old breed. But as of now, they call the shots. Hip-hugging jeans, flashy T-shirts, disco music and Wrigley's chewing gum. It isn't difficult getting across to them. They have efficient secretaries. No power play, no games and no temper tantrums. In the '70s, stars took sadistic pleasure in keeping a journalist waiting for hours. The new generation is spontaneous and upfront.

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Bed, Bath and Breakfast:

Jackie: My parents and I live in a one-room house in Teen Batti, which is our drawing-cum-dining-cum-bedroom. I sleep on one cot, my father sleeps on the other cot. My mother sleeps on the floor. I don't find the situation inconvenient. After all, I have been living like this for the past 27 years. My father had rented this room during his student days and ever since we have never shifted out. Only those days the noise on the streets was not as unbearable as it is today. Now the place is cacophonous! We don't have a toilet and a bathroom inside the house. There's a common bathroom outside for the entire floor. Luckily for me, I wake up early so I don't have to wait in a queue.

I don't normally eat breakfast. When I'm hungry I eat bread, biscuits, green vegetables, oranges, whatever is there in the house. I make my own tea. My parents are asleep when I leave for work. If my mother gets up early, she prepares my tea and then wakes me up.

Anil Kapoor: Previously, I shared the bedroom with my brother Boney and all the servants of the house. Boney and I slept on the bed, whilst the servants slept on the floor. At midnight while going to the toilet, I would invariably trample on someone's arm or toe. The servants were fed up of my sleepy ventures but somehow, coped with me. Recently, however, we've renovated the room to serve as a bedroom-cum-business room. The present arrangement is such that only my brother and I can sleep in the room. The servants have been shifted out. I'm not in favour of very luxurious rooms. Frankly, I'm scared of luxuries. They make me lazy.

Bath and tension go hand in hand in my house. I don't know why, but I always forget to put off the geyser. In the last two years I have burst five geysers. I don't eat breakfast, except on Sundays. On Sundays, I want Punjabi *parathas* and fresh *dahi*.

Mohnish Behl: I was six years old when our Thane residence was burgled. I woke up that night to find my mother pushing a robber out of a window. The incident filled me with nameless fear. For years after that I could not sleep alone in a room. Either Mummy or the servant had to be present in the room at least until I fell asleep. When I was 16, we purchased this Cuffe Parade flat. Since Mom and Dad had almost settled down in Thane and I was still schooling, I had to shift into the new flat all by myself. Ever since, I've never shared my room with anybody. Sometimes, on the sets one has to share make-up rooms with a colleague, which is okay. I got used to living independently very early. It would upset me if my room was disorganised or untidy. If someone tries to clear the mess, it further disorganises me. Yet on my own, I'm incapable of maintaining cleanliness.

I usually rush through my bath because I'm paranoid that the water might stop halfway. We have severe water problems in the building. My breakfast is a routine, which my servant follows religiously. There are no complaints.

Sunny Deol: Until recently I shared my room with my younger brother Bobby. Even now I do it sometimes. Very often when we are watching a film, playing a game, we fall asleep in the same room. None of us at home are very fussy. We have been brought up to be flexible. My room looks the same as it looked earlier. Only now it's freshly furnished, so perhaps it appears more luxurious. But the comforts and the complaints are the same. In the past, when the room was not clean, I shouted at the servants. Today, when my room is disorganised I still shout and scream. My bath has a fixed timing. I return from my game of squash and immediately rush for my bath. I like a sumptuous breakfast and I like eating it hot but, I'm not particularly fussy. If it's not ready on time, I get a little angry, scream a little at the servants and finally leave for my shooting, feeling a little guilty.

Kunal Goswami: I've been given an independent room only recently. After my grandfather's death, I have shifted into his room. Before that for so many years I shared a room with my brother and never found it even slightly inconvenient. I don't feel my room needs a facelift just because I have become a star. My room is very comfortable and glamorous. The mystery, however, is that my room looks beautiful only as long as I'm not in the room. The duration of my bath depends on my moods. Sometimes, I take long beauty baths. Sometimes I bathe in a jiffy. At times when I'm sleepy, I even fall asleep in the tub. In a week, at least once my breakfast is not ready on time. I do get upset and pretend to sulk, but actually I'm very relieved because this is the only way I'm forced to diet. On my own the temptation to eat food is very strong.

Rajiv Kapoor: This room which I'm using at present, belongs to Dabboo by right. When Dabboo got married, Chintu shifted into the room. Before I shifted into this room, I shared my room with sister Rima. For so many years we had a difference of opinion on everything. The position of the beds, the colour on the walls, the cushion covers. Now at last, I lead my private life. I drop tea on my bedspread, I drop ash on the table. Yet temperamentally, untidiness infuriates me. I shout at the servants if my room is not tidy. At the same time, I can never be comfortable in an impeccably perfect room. Eventually, all that matters is a comfortable home you like returning to after a tired day's

work. In the evening when I enter the gate, my first thought is, '*Chalo, ghar pahunch gaye.*'

My bathroom and my wardrobe are on different floors. So, it's either a delayed bath or a delayed dressing up. Though I must confess, I've never gone upstairs to collect my clothes. My man gets it for me and he seldom makes mistakes. I don't eat breakfast. I've removed the word food from my dictionary.

Smoking, Drinking, Dating and Driving:

Jackie: I smoke only for films. I'm not fascinated by drugs, not in the least. I'm not particularly happy with my infrequent drinking either. I mostly drink when I'm with friends. This New Year, I resolved to give up drinking completely. The resolution was broken on February 1, my birthday. My friends forced me into breaking my resolution. I prefer drinking beer and three mugs is the maximum my constitution can take.

I don't have a steady girlfriend, though I love women. I love flirting with them. At the moment there's no time in my life to cultivate a steady relationship. In fact, there's no time to even date girls. I'd love to do it, but I'm working round-the-clock! I don't flirt or date my heroines. After work, I get into my car and rush home. I don't have a chauffeur because I love driving. I trust myself more than anybody else with my car.

Anil: I don't smoke at all. In fact, I don't know how to smoke. In *Kahan Kahan Se Guzar Gaya*, I was required to smoke and it was both an effort and a torture habituating myself to do it. It's strange but I feel uncomfortable just holding a cigarette. I've never consumed drugs and don't feel any curiosity for it. I've never enjoyed drinking. Except for very special occasions when I'm with friends, I avoid drinking completely. I'd like to date my girl at least once a week, but unfortunately girls don't fancy me — they don't give me any *bhav*. Heroines are out of question, because most of them have steady boyfriends. At one stage I used to romanticise about a live-in girlfriend but now I've decided that it's not practical. She'd create too many tensions and I'd get fed up and run away. I can't take tensions. My nerves are bad. I hate drinking. I feel helpless without my

chauffeur. My drive to the location is the only time I relax. I look out of the window and dream.

Mohnish: My quota of cigarettes per day fluctuates according to my state of mind and activity involved. The minimum amounts to at least one packet per day. When I was in college, I smoked Four Square or Wills. Now, I've changed to Marlboros. I don't take drugs and I'm not associated with any drug addicts. I don't drink anything but rum. I don't date girls, because I have a steady girlfriend. I meet her in all my free time. The thought of dating my heroines has never occurred to me. Her belonging to the film industry or outside should matter little, as long as I'm attracted to her and she feels the same way about me. I'm very shy, especially with the opposite sex and it takes me a long time to make friends with a woman. I have no snob morals about live-in relationships. It's a subjective decision depending on you, your family, your upbringing. I don't mind the set-up if my girlfriend was game. However, I'd not offer her this arrangement until I have a definite plan for our future. My intention while making the proposal would be fair. That circumstances may change after a few years is a different thing. If I'm using my Mustang, I insist on driving it myself. I'm insanely possessive about the car and I don't trust anybody with it. Not even my father. For shootings, normally I use the Fiat and always the chauffeur drives me to the studios.

Sunny: I don't smoke, drink or take drugs. I've never dared to. I'd date a girl if I'm attracted to her. I can't say off-hand what sort of a woman she should be. She could be my heroine, she could be any ordinary attractive girl. All these things somehow don't work out in theory. It all depends on the moment. Today, more and more people are living openly without marriage. Opinions differ. I wouldn't do it. The urge to drive my car or not depends on my mood. I prefer having the chauffeur with me all the time.

Kunal: I don't smoke, drink or take drugs. Dating is something one has to do leisurely. You can't have shooting tension on your head and take a girl out. I don't usually date too many girls. I don't know about the future. To have a live-in girlfriend is not advisable — at least not in the early stages. You can't be sure about the future and the situation can get difficult to handle. I prefer to drive the car myself. I love cars. I love driving.

Rajiv: In the past, I used to smoke *chupke chupke*. In the toilet, in the backyard, in *bhabhi's* room. Now at last I smoke openly, leisurely. I enjoy my morning cigarette. It makes waking up easier. I believe that life is exciting and everything should be experimented at least once. Except drugs. I'm dead against drugs. I feel sorry for drug addicts. Those who've tried drugs say that once you've tasted the *nasha*, it's difficult to give up. If I feel the need for a high, I can always take an extra drink. Magazines have called me a boozard, an alcoholic. The allegations are nothing but a pack of lies. I drink with friends, at parties and when guests come home for a meal. Sometimes, I get carried away and take an extra drink. So what? I'm still young. I've yet to grow, bloom, blossom. I'll change with age and time.

I seldom date girls. Actually my circumstances have changed (from an assistant to a hero to a flop star) so I guess girls find it difficult to decide about me. I wouldn't mind dating any pretty chick (in the film industry or outside) because after all girls are girls. It's healthy to have a girlfriend, though it is unhealthy to be in love. Once you are in love all the beautiful moments disappear. Every single moment is full of tensions. I like to drive my car, but most of the time I allow my chauffeur to drive it for me.

Pack-up, Late Nights and Workouts:

Jackie: After pack-up I go directly home. If I have to go out, I change and then go out again. If my venue is close to the place I'm shooting, I carry my night-out clothes with me. Even if I'm coming home half an hour late, I'm expected to call and inform my folks. My parents like to know about my whereabouts. I don't have very exciting outings. No disco dancing, and no candlelight dinners. As a rule, I don't have too many late nights. I can't afford to. I'm shooting every day. I wake up at 6.30 a.m. and do my workout. Next, I run around Hanging Gardens. By the time I get back, it's daylight and time to leave for work.

Anil: It all depends on what time I pack up, where I am, what is my frame of mind, and how energetic I'm feeling. If I've given a bad shot, of course, I don't want to meet anybody. I stopped going to the disco about five years ago. Recently for my birthday bash, it seemed as if I was dancing after ages. Sometimes I do take my girl to a restaurant for a quick meal, but it isn't normally a quiet scene, because these

days people recognise me. I'm allergic to late nights. Two successive late nights cripple my functioning completely. Yet, no matter how hard I try, I cannot go to bed before midnight. I wake up at 6 a.m. because I have to do my special workout for a minimum of 45 minutes. Everytime I've not exercised, I've felt both physically and mentally uncomfortable. Somehow, I have always noticed that everything goes wrong the day I have not exercised.

Mohnish: I'm normally at home in the evenings, after pack-up, unless my girlfriend's home happens to be on my way from the location. On such days, I drop in at her place and come home after dinner. I'm not exactly particular or extra fussy about informing my parents about my whereabouts. My parents accept the fact that I can look after myself. I don't go on an outing very often. When I do, I'm terribly self-conscious of people recognising me. Their behaviour affects my behaviour. I'm more polite, more conscious, less normal. I get easily stumped in a crowd. In fact, I never do any socialising. I don't attend any parties, unless it's a function pertaining to my career. I wake up fairly early. I exercise vigorously for a little while. In the past, I used to jog every morning. These days I've given up jogging. It seems too much of an effort when you are living on the 31st floor.

Sunny: If I'm carrying my kit with me, I sometimes go directly for my game of squash after pack-up. If I'm not carrying my kit, I come home to collect it, make a few phone calls and then go out. I prefer coming home for at least 10 minutes before I go out in the evening. Somehow, it makes me comfortable. I seldom go out to discos or restaurants. I don't feel like it. Besides, people stare at you everywhere. It makes me awkward and shy. I can't take late nights at all. Unless I'm shooting, I never have a late night. I'm always in my bed by 10.30 p.m. and fast asleep by 11.30 p.m. I wake up almost at early dawn. I go for an hour of horse riding and after that a vigorous game of squash. By the time I return I'm exhausted.

Kunal: Sometimes I feel too lazy to come home and change for a party I'm supposed to attend. In that case I carry my clothes with me to my shooting and dress up at the studio. I make it a point to call up home and inform them about my late arrivals. If I don't, they get very tense. It's not that I go

out gallavanting often, but when I do I'm conscious of people recognising me. In a restuarant where one has gone to eat food, one is only watching reactions. I never have late nights. I'm always in bed by 10.30 unless of course, I'm shooting late. I wake up early because I like to enjoy one hour of horse riding.

Rajiv: If I'm doing a normal shift then I prefer to go directly to the health club after my pack-up. If from the health club I feel like visiting one of my friends, I make it a point to call up home and inform my folks. Very often I forget to call them and they get worried. At night, when I return they are assembled in the drawing room waiting for me. I enjoy outings. I enjoy gallavanting. When I'm in a mood to hog, I prefer going to all these sidey restaurants because that's where new actors like me would get an opportunity for projecting oneself an opportunity to recognise my own power. I don't enjoy late nights, but habitually I'm addicted to them. Somehow, when you're talking, you drink and it gets late. Maybe henceforth, I'll sit with an alarm clock in my pocket. I can't wake up very early but I manage to play a game of squash before I go for my shooting.

Off-Days and Working Days:

Jackie: I try not to be late for my shooting but how quickly I can leave my house depends on how quickly I finish my big job. After this great act, I'm normally ready within 10 minutes. I mostly try to make appointments with producers and directors on location. But it's not always possible. So very often I'm delayed by an-hour-and-a-half. I don't carry food from home. It means causing too much inconvenience to my mother. I prefer to eat whatever I get on the sets. Unless of course my mother has prepared my favourite *karela* or *palak*. In that case I carry even leftovers.

On Sunday, I make it a point to see a morning show. Preferably an old Hindi film. I eat lunch with my parents, rest in the afternoon and then go out with friends in the evening.

Anil: My morning mood depends on how well I have slept. In the past I was habituated to minimum eight hours of sleep. Now I can manage with even six hours of undisturbed sleep. I try not to fix any appointments in the mornings because that is the time I normally like to spend with my

family. As it is, most of the time everybody is fast asleep when I leave. On Sundays, I don't have a fixed routine.

Mohnish: My enthusiasm depends on what is ahead of me. If I'm shooting a dramatic scene I wake up all excited and worked up. If it's a dull day ahead I normally laze about in bed as much as possible. On Sundays, I like to wake up as late as possible. Till I've had my tea and breakfast, I like to laze around in my room enjoying my favourite music. In the afternoon, we normally have lots of rum and a sumptuous meal. Finally, the TV film is a must. No matter how bad the film, the Behls must watch the film. My father takes it as a bad omen when he misses the Sunday film.

Sunny: My secretary decides on my appointments and I follow his advice. Most of my appointments have to be fitted into the hour of returning from squash and my hour to report or shooting. On Sundays, I don't shoot. I make it a point to be at home for the family lunch. In the afternoon I see a video film with whoever is free or chat with Grandfather. Sometimes I go out with friends in the evenings. Sometimes friends come home. Mostly, I like to spend the entire Sunday at home so that by night I really feel I have enjoyed a holiday.

Kunal: On a working day or a Sunday I'm forever in a sleepy mood in the mornings. In fact it takes me two hours to be up, and ready to leave for work. I don't like carrying food on locations. Sometimes, when Mom has cooked a special dish, she packs up some in my shooting kit without even informing me. On Sundays, everyone in the family makes it a point to stay at home. I spend most of my time chatting with my grandmother. I never watch the TV film.

Rajiv: I'm very quiet in the mornings. It takes me half an hour to finish reading the newspaper and another half an hour to recognise the servants. My mother has a mania for changing servants every day. Every poor man who comes to ask for a job is employed. Their duties change every day from the garden to the kitchen. My father and I are forever greeted by strangers who keep wishing us good morning. I don't have a personal spotboy as yet. On Sundays, I'm at home, entertaining friends or watching films.

Stardom and Relationships:

Jackie: My parents are like any other parents in the world.

They give more than they take. It's true that now I have more liberty — but that's because I'm older now, not because I'm an actor. My lifestyle is the same. I live in the same house. I eat the same food. In the past, when I was in school I was out of the house from 12.30 in the afternoon to 5.30 in the evening. Now when I'm shooting I'm out of the house from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. My closest friends are the same. They're happy with their jobs. My success has not changed the vibrations between us. In fact, all of them achieved success much before I did. My basic temperament has not changed. I'm spontaneous, impulsive and sometimes get angry, but I don't bang doors. Which door can I bang since there is only one in this house? If I'm in a foul mood, I slip into my *chappals* and go for a long walk.

Anil: My parents' attitude towards me has been the same. From *Hamare Tumhare* to *Woh Saat Din* to *Mashaal*, there's no change in their behaviour. I don't feel different towards them either. Except maybe now that I'm independent, I'm a less demanding child. I've known of so many instances where overnight families start fussing over their star-child. In my house I'm still treated like the middle son. The elder one gets all the *bhav*, the youngest one gets all the *laad*. I'm the *beech ka bechara*! In fact, every one in the family except me has a foul temper. I can't recall a single instance where I've screamed at anybody. In fact, when others do it, I take my pillow and go to sleep.

Mohnish: I feel suddenly I've become more affectionate towards my parents. In the past I was very reserved. After joining films, I feel the urge to express my affection to them in words, in action. There are very delicate feelings churning within me. I've yet to confront these changes. I've yet to sit with my parents and discuss it. I don't sense drastic changes in their behaviour towards me. I know that when I was younger I was more aloof, more withdrawn. Today, I demand less attention. With outsiders however I'm wary. I find it difficult to relate to people. The new profession has brought new insecurities and alien fears.

Sunny: In the initial stages, during the making of *Betaab*, Mom and Dad worried and prayed that I achieve recognition. Now that *Betaab* is a success, their concern is that I should be able to maintain my success. So the process of trial and error continues. And along with it continues

their concern, care and caution. As for stardom, it's not a new word in the family. Dad has been around for years. I don't sense any great changes in me. On outdoors, if I feel it, I buy gifts for the family. But this is not a conscious effort. I'd have bought gifts for them, even if I was in any other profession. I'm still frightened and shy of my parents, so what if I have become a big hulk. If I'm in a foul mood, I'd be embarrassed to show my temper. Even they would be shocked. I'd prefer to collect my kit and go for a game of squash.

Kunal: There are a few changes. Both my parents have rationed their scoldings and threats of bashing me up. Probably, they have realised that *bachcha bada ho gaya*. Until the child starts earning or gets married his family treats him like a baby. At last, I'm treated like an adult now. On my part there are no major changes. I don't go to discos and I don't have late nights. With my brother, my relationship is the same. Only in the past we spent more time together. Nowadays, both us are busy.

Rajiv: Tell me what has money got to do with emotions? But yes, in small, niggling ways I do feel a difference in my father's attitude towards me. On the sets of *Prem Rog*, I was his assistant so he treated me like shit. Now for *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, I'm the hero of the film, so in my heart of hearts, I'm expecting my father to pamper me like he pampers his other heroes. Personally, I'm the same towards Papa and Mummy. I'm frightened of them and yet I keep getting into trouble with both of them. When I was an assistant, I would give Mummy Rs. 50/- a month. Now that I'm a hero, I'd like to give her more. If she doesn't accept, I get sentimental about it.

Choice of Films and Date Hassles:

Jackie: I decide on my proposals. On ethical grounds, I don't cancel dates I have committed myself to.

Anil: There was a time when my brother and a few friends advised me what films I must sign or reject. Since the last six months, I'm solely responsible for my decisions. I decide on the basis of the script, director and money. I don't cancel dates but if there is a very exciting script, I'd go out of my way to adjust dates to enable working on that project.

Mohnish: Normally there is no difference of opinion between my parents and me. I value their judgement more than I value my own. I have the intelligence to understand that if I reject a worthy film, it's not the end of my career. If I accept a wrong film, the mistake can put me back by a minimum of five years. If there are friends who have signed me before I proved my mettle, I'd definitely consider his case as a special issue. Otherwise, my dates are handled by my secretary.

Sunny: It's a joint decision between my father and me. Sometimes if one of us disagree, we sleep over the offer and decide about it a few days later. The decision mainly depends on the subject and the director. My dates are given to producers as per the agreement. There's no unfair dealing with anybody.

Kunal: My dad makes the decisions for me. However, he gives the final word after consulting me. No producers' dates are cancelled just like that. We don't cause them inconvenience and don't accept any inconvenience in return.

Rajiv: I decide on what films I'll sign or reject. I don't consult anybody before I reach the conclusion. After all, it's my career. I should be able to handle it on my own. I don't expect my friends to do me any favours and in return I expect them not to expect favours from me. Friendship is friendship. And profession is profession. These two cannot meet. And whenever they meet, they are bound to clash.

Money, Investment and Expenditure:

Jackie: At this stage money is not at all important to me. Maybe my answer will be different after a few years. My parents don't interfere in my money matters at all. They tell me it's your money, you handle it. Now that money is flowing in, I have to worry about handling investments. I don't have a secretary as yet, so I talk about my payments to producers directly.

Anil: Money is definitely important. Initially, I used to be very embarrassed talking about payments with my producers. Now I have gotten over my shyness. After all, I'm doing my job. Am I not? My parents don't interfere in my money matters at all. For my own discipline, I make it a point to be answerable to them for my expenditure. Like in the past, I still take money from my parents. I don't like

keeping more than 100 rupees with me. I'm very careless with money. To this date I've never spent a penny at my shootings. Yet in the evening when I return home I have invariably lost my wallet.

Mohnish: Yes, money is important. I'm not in the least embarrassed talking about my payments with producers. Normally, the first instalment is handled by Mummy or my secretary. The following instalments, I handle on my own. I'm allowed to spend and withdraw as much money as I want. I have an independent bank account. However, if I were to withdraw more than my budget, I'm sure they would caution me. As yet, I've not come to a stage of deciding on investments.

Sunny: I'm used to money. I feel when you are in a profession like this you cannot afford to be embarrassed talking about payments. I talk about money to my producers very freely. If I don't, then my dad does it for me. My parents don't question or spy on me, how much money I've spent every month. They merely guide me when I seek their aid. I've no fixed allowance. Whenever I need money I take it from *Ma*. When I need lots of money, I take it from my producers.

Kunal: Money at the moment is not very important to me. In fact, I seldom talk about payment with my producers. Most of the time Dad does it for me. My parents initially did not give me a free hand in handling money. After all, I was so young and understood very little. Even now, I don't understand as much as I should. I prefer not handling money directly. When I need it, I ask my father. He gives me as much as I ask.

Rajiv: Of course, money is important. Money is important in everyone's life. I earn money because I give service. Nobody is obliging anybody. My parents don't ask me any questions about my money. All my mother says is don't waste money, don't disrespect money. I don't waste money, but as yet I only earn as much money that can look after myself. Even when I'm very rich, I'll never throw away this old telephone. It's a gift from a dear friend! Yet once, I was so broke that I wanted to sell this telephone to buy a drink for myself.

Home, Style and Idols:

Jackie: According to me, only *nawabs* have style. Dev Anand, amongst the yesteryear stars and Om Puri amongst the present stars are my idols. I'm a fairly domestic man. I'm aware of how much the regular bills come to. I'm also aware of the salary our servant is paid.

Anil: Getting noticed in a crowd, without consciously trying to attract attention, is what style is according to me. Maybe I do have the quality. Amitabh Bachchan and Naseeruddin Shah are my idols. I don't know the exact figure of our bills at home, but I'm vaguely aware of the monthly expense of the house. I'm aware of the salaries the servants are paid.

Mohnish: Something that appeals to a multitude of people is style according to me. I don't know if I have style. It's for the others to decide that. I have no idols. But my ideal hero is Amitabh Bachchan. I'm more or less aware of the household expenses and the salaries of the servants.

Sunny: Just being natural is style according to me. I don't know if I have style. It's for others to judge. My idol among the yesteryear and the present lot is my father. He is the best, at least according to me. I'm roughly aware of the salaries the servants are paid at home.

Kunal: A pattern of living, thinking, and behaviour is style according to me. I don't think I have style. I don't have an idol actor. But my idol dancer is Shammi Kapoor. I'm absolutely ignorant about our monthly expenses, or the salaries paid to servants. In fact, previously I was better informed. Maybe then, I had more time.

Rajiv: The way you live, the way you talk, the way you project yourself is style. Money is not style. My father and Shammi uncle are my idols. I'm vaguely aware of the salaries a few of the servants are paid at home. For instance, I know how much my chauffeur is paid because I pay his salary.

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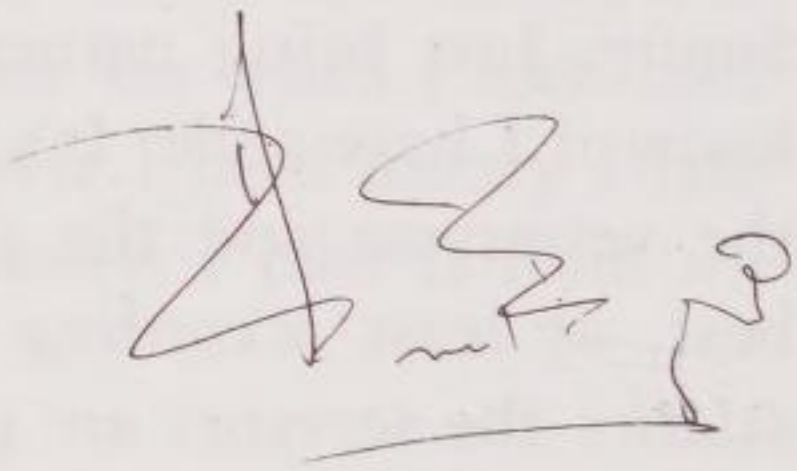
'I haven't changed at all, except for my address — which is a plush apartment and my two beautiful kids. If I had known children bring so much joy, I would have married much earlier.'

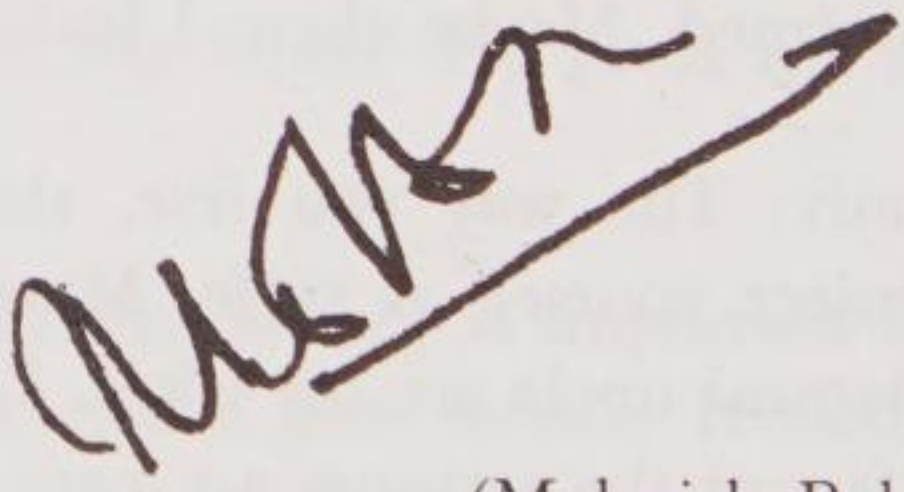
(Jackie Shroff)

'We all sound so carefree. Jackie and I have really come a long way. At that time we were the only two who were not star sons. He still had a godfather in Subhash Ghai. Chimpoo, Sunny and Kunal had illustrious fathers and Mohnish was Nutan's son. I was quite sure I would never make it. I feel so fortunate that I have.'



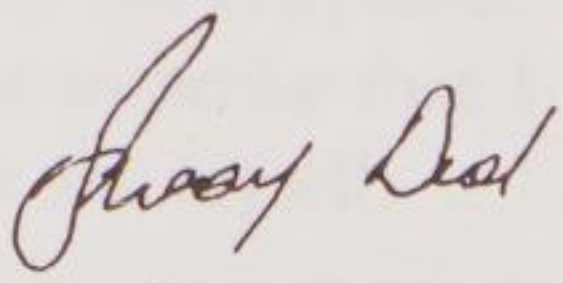
(Anil Kapoor)

'All of us have more or less made it in the direction we started out. Some of us took longer, some of us changed our paths, but we made it to our goals.'



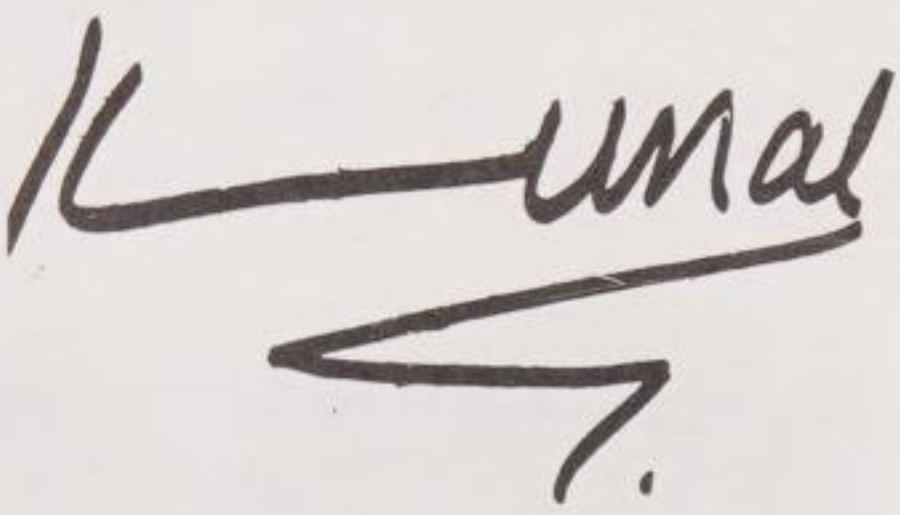
(Mohnish Behl)

'A lot of water has flown under the bridge.'



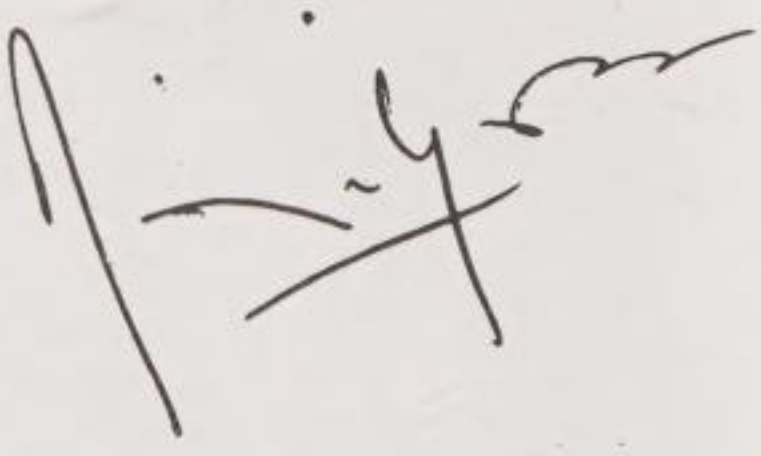
(Sunny Deol)

'Most of the things are still the same — my family life, temperament haven't undergone drastic changes. When you are younger and inexperienced, you perceive things a lot differently, though. I wasn't in the least bit prepared for the turn of events that followed. I had great expectations of my career and never once imagined, that the graph could slide down. I was an optimist but learnt that life is not all that easy. Today, I'm more realistic. I don't believe that just because I'm sincere, my efforts should be applauded. Sometimes, things happen, sometimes they don't, but one must continue to try. The only consolation being that even in the past, I was never dishonest.'



(Kunal Goswami)

'At that time I was making my debut and therefore flying. The article is relevant today because I'm on the second round of my career. I'm self searching and answering a lot of questions. This interview was done 13 years ago. It makes me realise I haven't changed all that much. Circumstances may have altered, but not the way I feel. The mind state is different now, but then that's life.'



(Rajiv Kapoor)

1983

REKHA

'The day Rekha starts behaving like Rekha, it will be the end of Rekha.' Rekha had told me in one of her vulnerable moods while posing for our photo session. The photographer was discussing the airs stars put on when they reach the top. She had listened solicitously. 'I'll never be like that,' she whispered shaking her head. 'At least I pray that I don't become like that.'

Her resolution was earnest. Those days Rekha was given to making sudden and implusive resolutions. Then, she was a child of nature, as flighty as a breath — you couldn't hold her back for long. Over the years, as she climbed the rungs of stardom, Rekha changed. The starry airs she had once referred to with contempt, slowly, but subconsciously became a part of her system. She had become Rekha, the star.

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At 'Filmcity', on the sets of *Namkeen*, Rekha objected to the presence of a particular journalist and demanded that he be asked to leave. 'Or I will not give my shot,' she threatened. The director refused to relent. Rekha turned her head and stormed out of the sets, opted out of the film. The incident aggravated her into placing a heavy ban on the entire press. Overnight, Rekha, the once bubbly, talkative woman became inaccessible to journalists. Her silence was self-imposed. She chose to be isolated... To live in voluntary exile.

'Don't you feel suffocated? Don't you feel like lashing out?' asked a favourite colleague, who was shooting in the same studio with Rekha a few weeks ago. Rekha's answer was angry, bitter. 'I'll never speak to the press. Never. I spoke to them honestly but they spiced my words and painted me as a person I was not. Now, I don't wish to talk to them. I'll strike them with my work. I'll try and look better, act better. When they see my film, they will want to hate me. Instead, they will love me. That will be my victory.'

This wasn't the Rekha one was used to. Obviously, some strong influence was working on her. In the four years of self-imposed exile, Rekha has changed... One has the memory of a lively, gay person. Of a brutally honest, high-

strung woman. A woman given to fantasizing and sharing her fantasies with others. She dreamt about being a court dancer, dressed in shocking pinks and peacock blues. She was convinced that she was the reincarnation of a princess. She could be as sensitive as a poetess and discuss the beauty she saw in the sun, the moon and the stars. She craved for beautiful things and collected butterflies, crystals and green leaves. She could be like a child and play happily on a swing. She was insecure and carried her toys and her pillows to all her outdoor locations.

Today, as I try to understand Rekha and piece her together on paper, I go back in time...

1978: Natraj Studio. Lunch hour. Rekha sits sulking by her table, staring at her steel tiffin carrier. 'I'm on a strict green vegetable diet and life has never seemed so depressing,' she says swallowing a thin slice of cucumber. Her eyes are fixed on her hairdresser's plate which contains *tandoori* chicken. 'How is it?' she asks every five minutes. Then turning to me she says, 'I'm not really tempted but had it been prawn curry I wouldn't think twice about giving up my diet. For prawn curry, I can even break my fast. It's a curse to be fat. I envy slim girls who can eat all the *kachra* and still not put on weight. Somehow, these days I seem to crave for only two things—good food and rest and I'm denied both.

'Last night I was up till 4 a.m. We were at Raj Kapoor's party. This morning I lazed in bed praying that the sun would not rise! Really, I must stop fantasizing situations where I have an excuse to bunk shootings. The producers are fed up of my games. I know I'm in the wrong but what can I do? If at a particular moment I want to be with someone, then I can't hold myself back, and I run away from my location. Later I feel terrified and hide at a close friend's place, I realise all this is going to harm me but I just cannot help myself.'

Later, I bump into Dhirendra Kishen, Rekha's publicist. He offers me a lift home. During the drive, he narrates interesting stories about the actress. He tells me about the time he wanted to turn a producer and was keen on signing her. 'Everytime I mentioned this to her, she would change

the topic. Finally, one day she drove me to Hema Malini's bungalow. 'You want your film to be completed, don't you? Then sign Hema, *Mera koi bharosa nahin*.' As I got out of the car she removed her gold chain with a Tirupati locket and put it around my neck saying, 'Best of luck. May your film do well.'

Rekha is generous. Both with her heart and her purse. Acquaintances and friends tell stories about Rekha's generosity. What she has done for her family no other daughter could. On the men who touch her life, she casts a spell. She loves them till it overwhelms. Yet, everytime she is questioned about it, her acts of generosity, she is evasive. Then one day she said, 'Everyone thinks I am generous, but I know I am not. On the contrary I feel I'm very selfish. Am I not seeking security with my small gestures? I'm all the time frightened of losing love from people I care for deeply.' The woman surprises me. She is well aware of her weaknesses. She knows she is talented but cannot help being temperamental. Raj Kapoor, after seeing the rushes of Dabboo's film, *Dharam Karam* had said about her, 'If only Rekha could concentrate, she would reach dizzy heights.' She lacks ambition. Emotion is the dominant force in her life. When she is happy, her eyes sparkle. When she is depressed, her face breaks into a rash.

1979: Inside her bedroom. Everything is in a mess. Rekha is on a cupboard-cleaning spree. Her round bed is cluttered with clothes and knick-knacks. The home has a typical holiday atmosphere. Rekha's mother Pushpavalli walks in with a foolscap paper and reads out the month's *hisab* to Rekha in Telugu. Rekha listens, disinterestedly. To everything her mother reads out she nods her head and says, 'Okay... okay... okay.' We cannot begin the interview immediately. There are too many distractions. There is the building's secretary who needs Rekha's signature on certain documents, there is Dhanu, her younger sister discussing Geography with her friend on the telephone. She puts the receiver down and tells Rekha that she has a difficult exam the next day and is very nervous. After everybody leaves, Rekha pushes the clothes on one side and stretches herself on the bed. 'How will Amol Palekar and I look together? Basu

Chatterjee wants us to do a film, I think I should refuse. I'll look too big-built compared to him. Actually I'm very stupid when it comes to choosing my films. I don't give enough thought to the script or any other details. I go by the mood at that particular moment. If I'm upset after a particular phone call, I refuse a film. If I've eaten a yummy prawn curry, I'll say 'yes' to any odd film.'

She appears preoccupied. Time and again she picks up the telephone to make sure it is working. There is a restlessness about her, she says, 'When I'm in love, I'm in it completely. Every minute of every hour I'm thinking about him. It's him, him, him all 24 hours. If he has promised to call at a particular time, and he doesn't, I bring the roof down. After all, he shouldn't have promised if he wasn't sure he could call me.'

I'm ill-at-ease with her sudden revelation but she continues nevertheless. She folds her arms, sits upright on the bed and continues, 'I believe that life is nothing but little moments. I give a flower to someone who matters very deeply. After three days I ask him, 'Where is the flower?' He says he has lost it. My heart sinks, but this isn't sorrow. It is not as if I love him more, or he loves me less. It's just that, at that particular moment, when I give him the flower, he reacts to me, to my emotion, to the flower. What happens later, doesn't matter. There's no permanence. At least, happiness is not permanent. And yet happiness is all I crave for. I want happiness in everything I do.'

'Is love also a mere momentary feeling for you?' I ask. 'All I know is that love is blind, deaf and mute. It's like a child playing in the mud. You cannot reprimand the child with logic at that time. It doesn't matter to him that he is getting his hands, feet and clothes soiled. It's only when he falls and hurts himself, that the tears will flow. And by then, it's too late. The wound is inevitable. Love is not a momentary feeling. Love cannot be so ruthless. But it doesn't hold a promise of permanence either. One thing is certain though — a human being loves himself more than anyone else. That is why your strongest bond is always with your children. Your child is born from you, your flesh and blood. Every other relationship becomes secondary.'

The Rekha who seemed so confident of her power over men, was sounding insecure. Was it just a phase? Was she questioning the futility of her relationship now that the first flush of romance was over? She isn't apologetic about the outburst. Whether it's pain or anger, she feels the need to express. 'I haven't aborted anybody's career,' she had said when she stopped working with ace villain Imtiaz. 'He has aborted his own chances, so don't blame me for sins I've not committed. Imtiaz cannot lie shamelessly in interviews and expect to be forgiven. I'm not so noble.'

1980: In the wake of the *Namkeen* controversy, Rekha has stopped talking to the Press. Once in a while when I run into her in studios, she chats, making sure that every word is off-record.

I am at Mehboob Studio to meet Reena Roy on an assignment. On the neighbouring set Amitabh Bachchan is shooting for *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar*. During the lunch hour Rekha drops by on the sets. 'I have an appointment with Prakash Mehra,' she tells my colleague who is interviewing Bachchan. She seems to be in a communicative mood and I decide to ask her for an interview. She smiles, concentrating on the new song *Salaame ishq meri jaan zara kabul karlo* which director Prakash Mehra is playing for her. I'm thinking of my interview and interrupt her thoughtlessly. Very discreetly, when the director is not looking, Rekha explains that the producer is playing this song specially for her and if I talk to her now, he would feel offended.

It's a lesson for life and I remember it. I keep shut. But I don't get my interview. I decide to try again. I meet her the following week. She's shooting at Sunkist bungalow for *Saajan Ki Saheli.* The director, Saawan Kumar Tak is pleading with her to sing a song for his film. Rekha listens to the lyrics, hums the tune, then tapping her feet lightly, says, *'theek hai main sochti hoon.'* It's her way of concluding the discussion. Then she turns to me... She's willing to chat, but not on record, no interview. There's a visitor on the sets. Sushma Seth. Squatting cross-legged on a sofa, the two women talk animatedly. Rekha is narrating a hilarious incident involving a crazy fan. Sushma is more amused at

Rekha's mimicry than the incident. 'This girl is terrific,' she tells me when Rekha goes out to give her shot. 'There is never a dull moment with her.'

It's strange... notwithstanding the nasty rumours about Rekha, those who come in contact with her only sing her praises. Rekha once said, 'It's difficult for people not to love me.' She does make friends easily. Then, somehow, inexplicably, the relationship sours and Rekha emerges as a destructive juggernaut smashing not just her own but others' loves and lives. She blazes a trail of havoc, without meaning or wanting to. That's her tragedy.

1981: On the sets of Raj Khosla's *Daasi*, Rekha sits on a gorgeous carpet, dressed as a dancing girl. She's looking fabulous in red and gold. It is the usual *kotha* scene. There is a chandelier above and *mogra, paan daans*, spittoons and currency notes. I've come to the sets, not aware that Rekha will be there. Rekha's war with the press is at its peak. These days she does not even recognise us. I stand in a corner and stare. Suddenly she looks up and notices me. Her expression changes. Looking at her director she says, 'I don't want any visitors on my sets.' A week later, I bump into her at a common friend's. She comes and stands before me, then bending very comically asks, 'Hi. Do I know you?'

Her behaviour is unsettling. You do not know where you stand with her. Rekha wants all relationships at her convenience. If close friends cannot forget Rekha's impish spontaneity, her humour, her warm emotions, her sensitivity, they also find it difficult to forget her dangerous impulses, her reckless actions, her thoughtless statements. Like Yogeeta Bali, her first 'best friend' in the industry once said, 'Everytime Rekha is faced with a misunderstanding, she evades the issue. Rekha expects her friend to trust her implicitly when she herself is incapable of reciprocating.' Neetu Singh, at a later stage, analysed, 'She has this habit of withdrawing into herself. Actually there is a constant conflict within her. Rekha gets caught between her emotions and her ego, and most of the time to save her ego, she denies her feelings.' Zarina Wahab, the last of Rekha's good friends spoke about her with compassion. 'Rekha's worst enemies are

her ears. She believes everything she hears. She has no trust in people, and is highly suspicious, which is humiliating in close relationships. Another immature trait about Rekha is that she says freely what she desires about others but when others lash out at her, she can't take it.'

1982: At the private screening of *Jeevan Dhara,* Rekha is watching the film with her family. When the film is over, Rekha's sister says, '*Didi*, she's so much like you', referring to the central character, Sangeeta. When I see the film I get the same impression. Sangeeta of *Jeevan Dhara* has a lot in common with Bhanurekha Ganesan. She strikes terror in the house, drills it into everyone's head that she is the breadwinner. She is no martyr. Alternately vulnerable, she is like any ordinary girl. She dreams of happiness, of security, of home.

Four years ago, when Rekha purchased the plot for her new house in 'Sea Springs'. Bandstand she had said, 'My dream home is on the threshold ... and what a coincidence that the first instalment for this house should have been paid with the signing amount for money *Ghar*. I can't wait to do up my house. I just know that my home is going to be beautiful.'

At Mehboob Studio, director Muzaffar Ali is shooting patchwork of *Umrao Jaan*. In the make-up room, Rekha is with the architect who is doing up her new house. When I enter her room without warning, Rekha is rummaging through books on interior decoration. She gasps when she sees something attractive. 'See this staircase,' she tells the architect. 'Can I have a similar staircase?' The man scratches his head, nods.

When he leaves she tells her hairdresser, 'On my last trip abroad I did not buy a single thing for myself, I searched and searched for beautiful objects for my house, and I felt miserable that I couldn't purchase all I saw... I didn't have enough money.'

End of the year, she shifts to her dream home. While the rest of the family stays back in the old flat at Sea Bird, Rekha lives in her new bungalow with her mother. The two

women live all alone. Without servants. Without attendants. Her mother cooks whilst Rekha cleans the house. Every Sunday, Rekha attends to the routine chores: Sweeping, dusting, watering plants. She is obsessed with her new home. She trusts no one with its upkeep. She entertains no guests. Except the man in her life. Producers who wish to sign her for their films, wait outside in their cars. They send the documents in through the doorman who brings them back with Rekha's signature.

Once in a while Rekha does invite someone she takes a fancy to, to visit her precious home. Recently she invited a pretty girl from the *Utsav* unit. The girl was completely bowled over with what she saw. 'I've never seen anything so beautiful, so aesthetically done up. There are silver doors, brass decorations on every wall, on every window sill. I could have sat there for hours... simply staring.' And that is exactly what Rekha does if people close to her are to be believed. In the evening, when Rekha returns after a tired day, she relishes her privacy. Her home is her greatest joy. 'My home is like my baby,' she told a dear friend. 'I feel every corner of the house needs me.'

Is Rekha pining to have a baby? Is that the reason her conversation has a constant reference to children? At one stage when Hema Malini was pregnant, there were rumours about Rekha being pregnant as well. But as time passed, the rumours subsided and Rekha's priorities altered. She said in an interview to a newspaper, 'I do feel women are the superior sex. At one stage I was dying to have a baby. But not anymore. I don't think it's the ultimate thing for a woman to give birth. After you've had a kid, what next? You can't sit at home, cook, sew, play the *veena*, churn out more children. You have to be independent, you have to be as strong outside. That's why I jog and exercise regularly.'

1983: 6 a.m.: Dawn. A slim Rekha in a tracksuit is jogging outside her house. Her neighbours bump into her now and then. She is friendly with them. They greet her warmly, she waves back politely. But the neighbours are not informal with her. Rekha does not encourage familiarity. 'I don't want friends,' she explains to a well-wisher. 'They'll go and say

nasty things about me. Why must I invite unnecessary tensions? I'm better off without friends.'

6.30 a.m.: Sea Rock. Health Club. Rekha is ready for the workout. Rama Bans, the beautician, seeing Rekha's enthusiasm appoints her to conduct the morning classes. The hotel staff is accustomed to seeing Rekha in their premises. Once in a while she stops at the counter for a friendly chat, inquires after their work.

On the sets, at her shootings, Rekha is two people. One who is very friendly. The other who is unapproachable, depending on her mood at that particular moment. Colleagues whom she had dismissed with a mere good morning last week, today, Rekha sits chatting for hours, discussing her career, her work. 'I'm not a great actress, just a spontaneous one. I portray the character I'm playing by instinct. When I played Supriya in *Kalyug*, I did not completely understand her. Today maybe, if I were to play Supriya, I would project her differently.'

The actress has matured, turned more analytical. It depresses her that she might pop off one day without giving her greatest performance. The woman has mellowed. She no longer aspires to be a complete woman. The actress betrays her anxiety. The woman feels persecuted, exploited, yet refuses to give up. Her zeal is not extinguished. And yet, if Rekha appears defeated and drained, it's because she is not herself anymore. Those who've known her for long say that she has emerged as a new person. The Rekha one meets these days is not the real Rekha. Will Rekha ever be her old self again?

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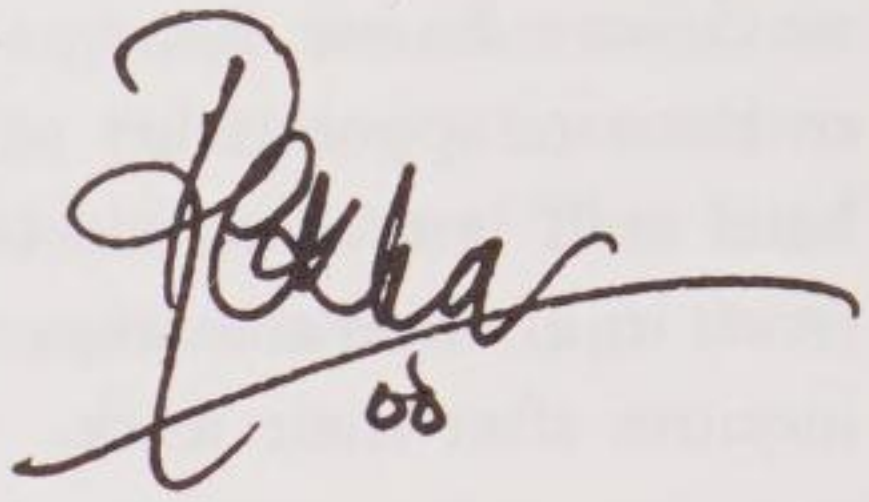
'I remember the story very clearly. I wasn't talking to the press at that time and was upset that my quotes were interspersed with the writer's impressions. Today, I'm more willing to accommodate other people's opinion about me, even if they are negative. In that respect, I've certainly changed. I'm still spontaneous, but in more serious issues, I've become guarded. I don't reveal things about myself that I don't want to. If despite this, the journalist manages to

make observations about me, the credit ought to go to her. This is the first time I realised that a journalist's job is in many ways similar to an actor's. The more he observes, the better he performs.'



(Rekha)

1983

ON THE SETS OF *PAAR*

Short, intense-faced Gautam Ghose, winner of the National Award for Daakal, *met Shabana Azmi at the Film Festival and standing outside the Siri Fort corridor, offered her his first Hindi film* Paar *(Getting Across). Shabana Azmi heard him out intently and within five minutes consented to do the film. So did Naseeruddin Shah.*

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Dates confirmed, Gautam Ghose sent telegrams to both Shabana and Naseer: 'No cheese. No butter. No rice. Diet yourselves to starvation.' Their roles required them to be starving Harijans. So Shabana observed *roza* during the entire month of *Ramzan* whilst Naseer restricted himself to his very special diet. With friends who visited them, the two discussed only their weight. Shabana said, 'For so many months I could not wear my jeans and jumpsuits. Now I can get into these clothes very easily.' Naseer was less ecstatic. He worried about how his dieting would affect his appearance in his new play to be performed in Calcutta. 'Now I'll look like an extremely thin Don Juan,' he said unhappily.

As days passed, common friends of Shabana and Naseer discussed how much weight both had lost. 'Naseer looks like a skeleton,' Ravi Baswani told Shabana. 'He has lost 10 kilos.' Shabana suddenly started feeling guilty about drinking the proffered Limca. 'Oh my God,' she sighed. 'Naseer has lost so much weight... I better not drink any more Limca.'

One month later.

The unit is put up at Naihati Jute Mill Guest House. As we enter the corridor, Shabana lets out a scream of joy. 'Wow! This place is beautiful. I wasn't expecting anything like this. Now I'm suddenly in a very good mood. This is so much better than staying in that crowded city.'

'I agree with you', adds Naseer. 'Even staying at Shantiniketan during *Khandhar* was not an exciting experience. I hope this place will be a refreshing change.'

Preparations for work begin immediately. The director's wife

is assisting him in the production and also in the selection of Shabana's clothes for the film.

Shabana's wardrobe for the film includes two cotton sarees, two blouses, one dark green petticoat, a few copper *taviz* to be tied around her arms and neck. That's all. Shabana surveys her clothes and says, 'The sarees look too new. Soak them in salt water, and dry them out in the sun. That will make them appear dirty and worn out.' She tries on her blouses, 'Aren't they too well-fitting for the character? I'm carrying with me a typical *Bihari* blouse.' She goes to her bag and pulls out a Magyar-sleeved long blouse. 'Ask the director if he approves of this? Please do tear the pocket a bit. Rub the edges of the cloth with a stone, so that it looks old and shabby.'

By lunchtime, all the artistes are in their costumes. The dining room has a village atmosphere. Shabana is in an orange *mulmul* saree with parrot-green floral print, while Naseer wears a *khadi kurta* and a *dhoti*. They do *namaskars* to each other like *dehatis*, then get down to eating chicken steak with fork and knife, while discussing Bernard Shaw in flawless English.

After lunch, Naseer settles down in the armchair for the barber to shave his head. Naseer says, 'I would have loved to keep a *shendi*, but it seems only Brahmins keep it. Sad.' Shabana sits on the chair opposite, while the make-up man paints tattoos on her arms and face. 'I'd have loved to have a serpent painted on my arm, but I believe only prostitutes paint serpent tattoos... So sad.'

After what seems like ages, the director arrives. With three files and two heavy books under his arm, he says, 'Hello, everybody I'm sorry I'm late.' He shakes hands with everybody. 'How do you find the weather? Do you like the place? Are you comfortable?,' he asks each one, but his mind appears to be elsewhere. Then he stares at his artistes, scans Shabana's tattoos, Naseer's haircut. 'Wear a black thread around your neck,' he tells Naseer. 'You must wear a nose-stud and toe - rings. It's a must for a married woman,' he tells Shabana. He continues to stare at them for a while, then gets up from his chair, and gives them a copy of the script each, saying, 'Scene 47. We begin work at 7 p.m.'

Until 7 p.m. Naseer and Shabana relax in the separate rooms. They wear their costumes through the day, even when they are not required on the sets. The shooting hasn't begun yet, but they don't seem to mind. Both are busy, well occupied. Shabana with her new obsession, embroidery. She carries her needlework box with her. Naseer with his rehearsals. He carries his script of *Don Juan In Hell* with him.

Late evening. A narrow lane. Crowds throng to see the shooting. People everywhere... In the balconies, on the rooftops, on terraces, peeping out of windows, standing in the doorway. Men. Women. Children. A thick rope cordons off the shooting area, and the cops hold the crowd back, but they lurch forward time and again, yelling '*Oyee... dakho...*(Look there) Shabana Azmi... Naseeruddin Shah.'

There's too much noise. Too much confusion. The artistes cannot hear each other's dialogues. They can hardly hear the director's instructions. There is a child crying somewhere... A woman screaming from another corner... Eventually, to bring some peace and quiet, they stop shooting for a while. Shabana is indifferent to the commotion around her. She sits on a stool nearby, then pointing to a little girl's dress in the crowd says, 'Do you like the embroidery on her yoke? I think it's very attractive. I'm dying to go to the guest house and stitch the same flower pattern.' Naseer says, 'Any idea what is pack-up time? I'm dying to get back to the guest house and do some exercise.'

Twenty minutes later they read the lighting and begin shooting again. Now they are shooting a scene with Shabana and the *thakurain*. The *thakurain* is cleaning utensils from the tap water and talking to Shabana who is drying her freshly washed saree on the clothes-line. The *thakurain* asks her about Naseer's job prospects. '*Tere mard ko kaam mila ke nahin?*' she asks Shabana. Shabana looks into the camera and does not say anything. C-U-T. After three takes the shot is okayed.

When the shot is over Shabana joins me and says, 'I'm supposed to be four months pregnant in the film. Naseer (my husband) and I have left our village to come to the city

in search of work. She (pointing to the *thakurain*) is the woman who gives us refuge.'

'My film is mainly about the oppression of the peasants,' explains the director briefly. 'I narrate my story through these two characters — Naurangia and Rama. It's a film about Harijans, their travails in the big city.'

Naseer nods sagaciously. 'In films such as these, the message is the most important. Therefore, as actors, we should surrender and project as minimum mannerisms as possible. In this case, the starved, famished look is sufficient.'

The unit boy walks around giving tea to all the artistes in earthen cups. He carries with him a cloth bag from which he serves biscuits. (Nimki in Bengali). In Calcutta it's a custom not to serve plain tea. The Bengalis like to munch something all the time. Shabana sips her tea dreamily and says, 'I'm sure that pattern will not be difficult to embroider. Only I'm not certain if I have the same yellow thread.' Naseer looking in the other direction, shaking his head tells nobody in particular. 'I can jog in the garden every morning.'

2.30 a.m.: The unit packs up at last! The crowds have not diminished. Nor has their enthusiasm waned. Everytime they glimpse a star, they let out wild shrieks of excitement. Even at this late hour, the stars have a difficult time getting to their cars. People chase them like prisoners let loose from a cell. They run behind the speeding car yelling 'Naseeruddin *da* ... Shabana *didi*...' Inside the car Shabana says, 'The nice thing about Calcutta is that they call every woman *didi*, it's so much better than being called 'madam.'

At the guest house they bid hurried goodnights to each other. The director says, 'I'd better retire. I have to do my homework for tomorrow.'

The producer says, 'I hope somebody in the kitchen is awake. I want to give instructions to buy mangoes from the city.'

The make-up man frowns, removes his spectacles, then puts them on again. He wants to know what time he has to report the next morning. 'Do I come at 9 a.m. or do I come later?'

Naseeruddin Shah shakes his head constantly, 'What a pity,' he says. 'If I had known there was a tennis court here, I'd have brought my racket along.'

Shabana Azmi yawns and says, 'If I had known I would be spotting an attractive pattern, I would have carried some yellow embroidery thread.'

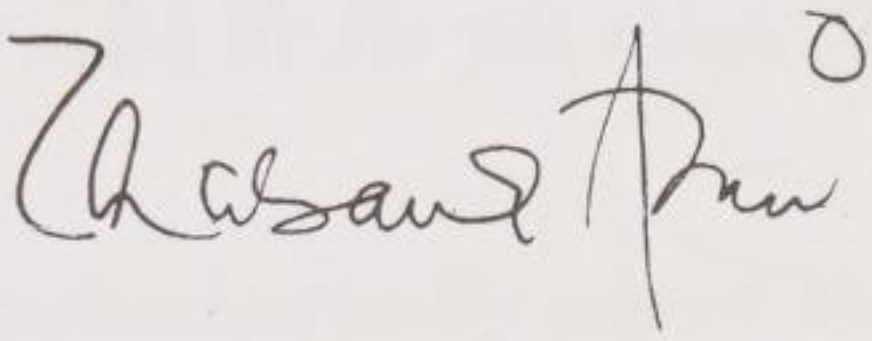
❀❀

'I guess this sort of stuff in '83 passed off for 'in-depth observation' or maybe 'charming intimate portrait' or 'inside picture' or something. But 13 years later it does nothing to me. I don't recall reading it then so I don't know how I may have felt about it. The observations aren't the most penetrating ones.'

(Naseeruddin Shah)

'How strange that there is no glimpse of how deeply *Paar* was going to affect me and propel me into activism. I remember a scene where Naseer and I are sleeping on the pavement — there was a lot of artificial rain, thunder, lightning, generator noise — five inches away from us was sleeping 'a real family' not actors. Through the deafening noise and the crazy shooting, she did not stir once in her sleep. She was so exhausted after working all day to earn one meal for her family, that she was oblivious to the discomfort, the heat, the noise. My heart went out to her and I felt deeply moved. There was another slumdweller with whom I'd made friends. I was using her as a role model and watched her intensely as she walked, talked and ate. She smiled easily and I took a deep liking to her. On the fourth day she took me to her home — a dark little black hovel with no water and electricity in which seven other people lived with her. I was amazed that she had retained her capacity to smile and be generous even in the midst of great adversity. I was seized by her. I felt that if I went back to Bombay to my air-conditioned comfort and did absolutely

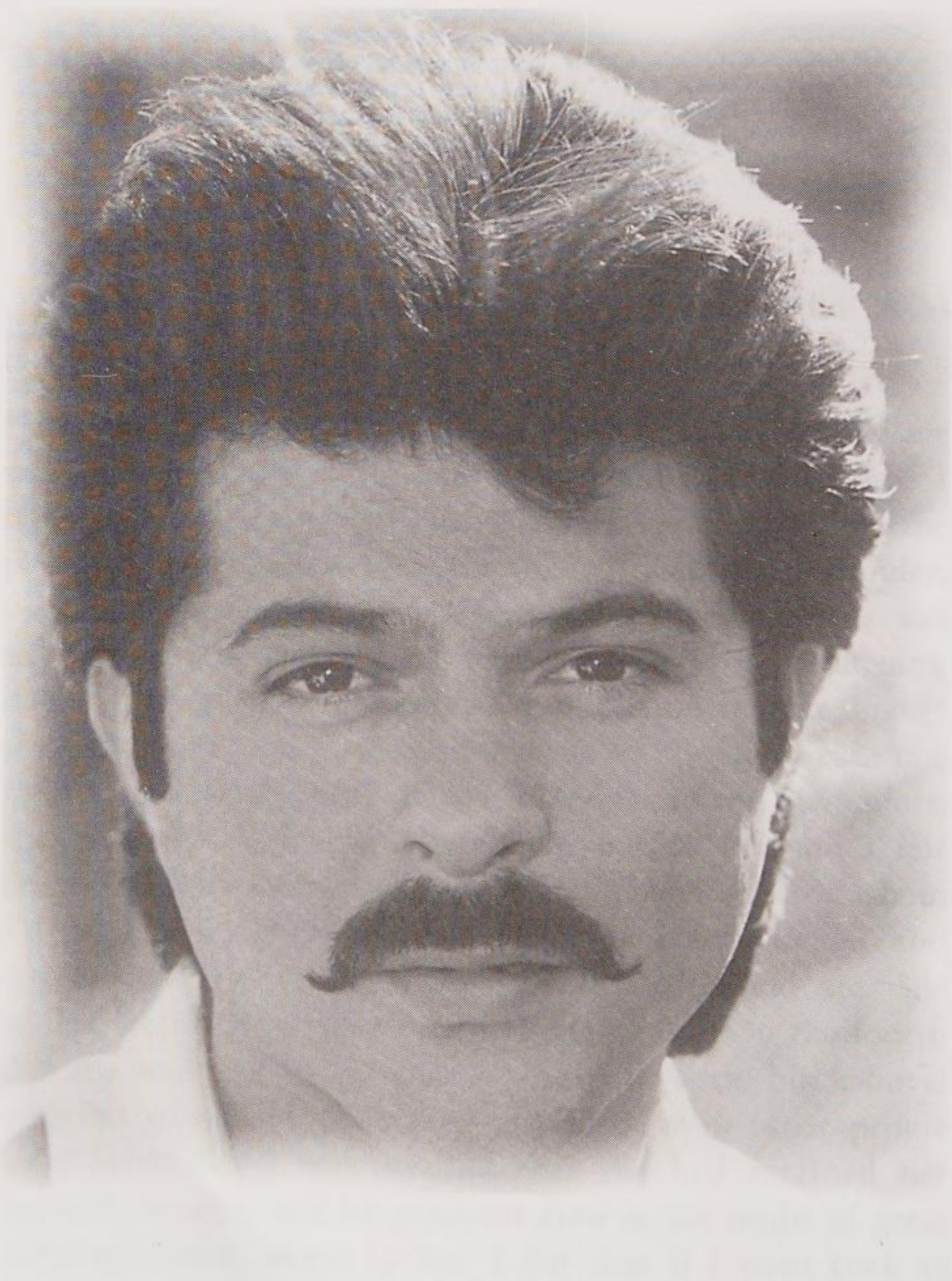
nothing to change the situation of others like her, it would be a travesty of the trust she had placed in me when we became friends. How could I use her to win perhaps a National Award and in the bargain never bother to extend any hand to help to improve her lot? That was the beginning of my work with *'Nivara Hakk'*, an organisation that works for the slum dwellers of Bombay and fights relentlessly to give them rights.'



(Shabana Azmi)

1984

ANIL KAPOOR



For years we planned for the day he would become a star and I would interview him. 'I'll write nasty stories about you, print bitchy articles...' I'd tease him. He would laugh crinkling his eyes and say, 'And I will stretch my legs, light a cigarette and tell you, 'Go away... no interviews...'

We'd laugh at this distant vision and feel immensely happy. After a while he'd get up stroking his moustache, stare into the mirror, comb his ruffled hair and ask very sombrely, 'But do you think I'll make it? Do you think I'll make it big?'

For hours he would speak enthusiastically about the various roles he'd like to play, and describe how he would play them. Then suddenly without warning, his enthusiasm would give way to impatience, to insurmountable depression. He'd slouch in a corner and withdraw preferring to keep silent.

After a while he'd get up arrogantly, slam his fist into his palm and mutter 'shit' beneath his breath. He'd go to the other room, collect his squash kit and hurriedly run away to the health club. Then, I wouldn't hear from Anil Kapoor for weeks... Until the next time, when he was either very happy, or very unhappy.

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Six years later.

His face stares at me from the *Mashaal* hoardings. Fantasy has become a reality. Anil Kapoor has become a star.

At the Dariya Mahal gate, where Anil is shooting there's a huge crowd. The rude watchman refuses to allow me in. So from a small hole in the wall, I yell out to Anil, to come to my aid. He is pacing up and down the garden. Mistaking me for one of his crazy fans, he waves out casually, then disappears into the bungalow. Our first professional encounter could not have been more dramatic.

An hour later we are sitting in his air-conditioned make-up room conducting the dream interview we had discussed for years. Both of us are awkward and detect distinct signs of

stardom in Anil — at times blushing, at times embarrassed. But most of the time apologetic. It's not easy to interview Anil Kapoor. He cannot concentrate on one thing for too long. He is easily distracted, intercepts my questions. 'Will people be interested in what I did as a child?' he asks. Then twinkling mischievously adds, 'I feel what I do now, is far more exciting.' We talk about his past, his films, his struggle, his sinking pessimism, before he finally achieved his present stardom. Like he himself explains, 'Nothing comes easily, just like that. One has to toil, one has to struggle.'

1956-72: Twenty-seven years ago when Anil Kapoor was born, his mother, who already had a 14-month-old son, did not rejoice at the event. There wasn't any money or time for celebration. A name was bestowed on the child casually. Anil. Years later, the boy was to turn sensitive and complain about the ordinary name. 'Why couldn't you choose a better name for me?' His parents' answer was 'Because we didn't know you'd grow up and want to become an actor.'

'I don't know when the acting bug first bit me,' says Anil, turning dreamy, 'but everyone in my school knew that I wanted to be an actor. Strange, because I had never discussed it with anybody. In fact, I don't think I was aware of it myself until one day a class friend's father, Kamal Sahni, signed me to play the young Shashi Kapoor in their film *Tu Payal Main Geet.*'

Those were days of boasting and bravery. Every day the 11 year-old would travel to Roop Tara Studio by bus, and in the evening, return home still wearing make-up on his face. 'I enjoyed being noticed by everyone,' says Anil without embarrassment. 'Even those days I felt shooting for films was something very special and I wanted people to know about it.'

One day Anil's shooting got extended until late night. By the time he got home, it was past midnight. His father Surinder Kapoor was extremely worried about his little boy. But when he learnt of his discipline, he was proud of his son. 'Even at that young age Anil was fiercely dedicated to his work,' says the father. 'A particular scene in the same film required him to play the *sitar*. Would you believe it, he actually went and got himself admitted to a music school so

that his posture while playing the instrument would seem natural! How strange that for so much zest, we never took our son seriously.'

Nor did his first producer S. K. Jain. On the sets, Anil, like any other child star was amiable and carefree. Today, everytime the producer meets Anil, he makes it a point to remind him of 'So what if my film never got released, I'm still the first to discover your talent and give you a break.'

1973: Amjad Khan was directing a play — *Devta* for the college annual day. He chose Anil for a stellar role. For weeks, he rehearsed religiously. On the day of the performance, Anil suddenly took ill and had to be replaced by another actor. A year after this incident, Anil did not have the guts to face the director. It was only recently, after the release of *Woh Saat Din*, that his guilt finally gave way. While shooting in the same studio, Anil mustered enough courage to go and shake hands with him.

Anil's adventures with the theatre world were short-lived. In his second year, he was expelled from college because of non-attendance. His parents, though upset by the news, were not shocked. Twelve months earlier, their elder son Boney had dropped out of college to pursue a career in business. Anil did not regret his untimely retirement from academics. 'In fact, I was happy that all my tensions were over. I went and joined Taneja's Acting School that same week. For two years I attended classes regularly. I did not bunk a single day.'

1975: *Ponga Pandit*, the home production, was launched as a quickie because their earlier film, *Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan*, was taking too long to go on the floor. Surinder Kapoor, unable to handle the headache of two films simultaneously, sent Anil to supervise the outdoor shooting of *Ponga Pandit* at Hardwar. But, unconcerned about production work, Anil was busy getting himself photographed in different outfits. And predictably, the outdoor turned out to be the most expensive schedule of the entire film. 'I detested monitoring the mundane details. The more I was pushed into it, the more I resented it.'

However, when one year later *Ponga Pandit*, and two years later, *Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan* bombed at the box office, Anil came to his senses. 'I realised that until my

homeground was strong, my family would never be able to launch my career. And the present losses were so many, that the dream seemed a remote possibility. The more I thought about my career, the more depressed I felt. Finally, one day, unable to cope with the pressures, I escaped to London for a holiday. There was no money at home to afford such an expensive trip. So I went along with a group of models conducting a fashion show on stage. All the money I got from the show, I spent on shopping. Now I had a brand new wardrobe but still no films.'

1978: At the Diwali party of family friend F. C. Mehra, Umesh Mehra offered Anil a small role in *Hamare Tumhare*. 'I fitted the bill of a young boy who would look like Raakhee's son. I was aware that the role didn't call for histrionics. Still, I needed something to keep me busy. Also, I think, I secretly romanticized my struggle. Those days, except for Rishi Kapoor, no newcomer had got stardom on a platter. All these star sons came years later.'

For the first schedule, Anil worked enthusiastically, but halfway through the second stint, he lost interest in the film. To wait for hours on the sets without giving a single shot for days demoralised him. 'This is not what I wanted out of life,' he told a dear friend. 'I have bigger dreams in store for myself, for future. I can't be satisfied with so little...' And finally, one sunny afternoon, without informing anybody at home, Anil went and booked himself a ticket to London. Once again, Anil Kapoor escaped. This time with a heavier heart.

1979: Those were depressing days of idleness, of utter boredom, of low self-esteem. For weeks Anil Kapoor would sit at home not knowing how to spend his day. Every day, every hour seemed a burden. Time and again he would hear of an exciting role for a newcomer. 'I would wear my best jeans, best shoes and smile, but somehow, the role always went to some lucky guy.'

One exciting role he desperately wanted to do, and which he eventually lost to Parvez, was G. P. Sippy's *Ahsaas*. Today, Anil philosophises, 'Ultimately what happens, always happens for the best. But at that time I desperately wanted the role. Would you believe, that to look young and innocent I had even shaved my chest? So, after all that, when

I didn't get it, I was heartbroken. And if Lekh Tandon had not offered *Ek Baar Kaho* at that time, I would have gone to pieces!!'

The long Darjeeling outdoor did wonders for Anil Kapoor's personality. Spending 30 days with 20 other aspiring actors lessened his pain. 'I stopped feeling I was all alone. I realised that there were so many who were even less fortunate.'

And just as Anil stopped worrying, he got a call from Subhash Ghai's office. 'For a while, everyone at home wondered if I was being called for *Krodhi*. On reaching the office, however, I realised that some new director wanted to sign me for his film, *Rachna*. Even though, I was initially disappointed with the news (I was expecting Subhash Ghai's film), *Rachna* was a change from playing bit roles to playing hero.'

Anil cherishes the memory of his first day of shooting. When the production boy opened the lock of the exclusive make-up room for him, he sat 'for a good 20 minutes on the sofa feeling overjoyed. I desperately wanted to ring up somebody and share this moment, but unfortunately the damn phone at the studio was not working.'

1980: Another euphoric moment was when Ritu Nanda, Raj Kapoor's elder daughter, spilled the beans on what her father had intended to be a top secret. 'Do you know that Papa is considering Anil for his next film *Paramvir Chakra?*' she informed Anil's mother casually. A long silence. Suddenly it seemed as if a bomb had exploded in Anil's household. Later, the same evening, the entire family spoke in whispers, too frightened to believe that the news could be true. 'We resolved that very moment that no matter how great the temptation, we will not ring up Raj Kapoor to confirm the news. Instead, we decided to play a ruse. Long ago we had read an incident, where Marlon Brando while trying to impress a particular director had got himself photographed in the particular character's disguise. The director, floored by Brando's enthusiasm, signed the actor on the spot. Boney and I decided to floor our Indian showman in a similar fashion. We arranged an exclusive photo session at Khadakvasala. I not only wore authentic uniform, stiched by the campus tailor, but even had a crew-cut from their local barber. For six hours we toiled untiringly until sunset. A

week later, I went to the R. K. cottage with my portfolio. For some time, I spoke to Raj Kapoor casually, then I sprang my surprise. He was speechless. He stared at the pictures, unbelieving, his eyes shining with excitement. 'You are confirmed,' he said finally, embracing me tightly.

1981: *Paramvir Chakra* was shelved and instead R. K. started *Prem Rog* with Chintu and Padmini. A disappointed Anil Kapoor packed his bags and went off to Melkote, where the family production *Hum Paanch* was on a start-to-finish schedule. 'I accepted that I could not run away from production. It was, after all, a family business and I had to help the family. Relying on outside assignments for a good break was getting more and more unpredictable.'

Every day of the long schedule in Melkote, Anil prayed for *Hum Paanch* to be a success. 'Too much was invested in this film... The debts which had to be paid up... My career... And finally the family's future...' The prayers were answered. *Hum Paanch* was a success. But Anil's career could not be launched immediately. He'd have to wait for two more years before the family could sponsor him. 'My patience had begun to flag. I was turning irritable and edgy. Director Bapu, who had become very fond of me on location, offered me a role in his Telugu film *Vamsa Vriksham*. I accepted immediately. It was the only way I could have kept calm. If I had stayed in Bombay without work for one more month, I would have turned neurotic.'

Vamsa Vriksham was a super success. Down South, one jubilee hit, and they immediately herald you as a superstar. Maybe this was the nicest thing to have happened to Anil. Everywhere he went, he was mobbed by autograph hunters and eager fans who were curious to know more about this *gora* hero. In between shots, he wrote letters to his family. And at night, in his hotel room, he mugged dialogues for the next day's shooting.

After the release of *Vamsa Vriksham*, Anil was flooded with several South offers but he rejected them all, except Balu Mahendra's *Pallavi Anu Pallavi*. Anil was fascinated with this director and could not get over the fact that they were sharing the same room for a whole month. 'Can you imagine using the same wash-basin and mirror as Balu?' he wrote to a friend, from Madras.

Back in Bombay, another proposal was bringing M. S. Sathyu's *Kahan Kahan Se Guzar Gaya*. 'The character is so much like me, confused, yet cautious. Vulnerable but decisive. He flits from adventure to adventure, takes relationships as they come.'

1982: Saawan Kumar Tak, after a lot of dilly-dallying, finally signed Anil for *Laila*. Javed Akhtar, who had broken off with partner Salim, saw a few songs from *Laila* and a few emotional scenes from Sathyu's film and recommended him to Ramesh Sippy for *Shatranj*. Unfortunately, *Shatranj* was shelved because of Amitabh Bachchan's accident. Instead, Ramesh Sippy plunged into *Saagar*. 'I hate sounding so emotional,' says Anil, 'but at that moment I felt as if some voodoo was guiding all this. Everytime I felt I was nearing the bank, I was being pulled back by some invisible force.'

1983: *Woh Saat Din* was announced. At last, the long cherished dreams were coming true. Anil Kapoor kept his fingers crossed. 'I did not believe my luck until I actually wore make-up and gave the *muhurat* shot. The character of Prem Partap Patialewala will always remain very dear to me. Probably because it is one of my first major breaks... I don't know... but with all the self-criticism I'm capable of, I feel I've done a very good job of a very difficult role.'

And yet, Prem Partap did not hound Anil Kapoor with sleepless nights in the way Raja of *Mashaal* did. For days before *Mashaal* went on floors, Anil fretted about Raja... How Raja would walk...? His accent...? His gestures...? His costumes...? A great part of this anxiety was caused by writer Javed Akhtar, whom Anil desperately wanted to please. 'In not a single shot did I want to disappoint him. Hence every scene I performed, I wanted it to be my best. I was very nervous when he saw the first rushes. To this day he has not told me anything about my performance, but to common friends, behind my back, he praised my work immensely. My efforts had proved worthwhile. All through the making of *Mashaal* I had been extremely tense. I didn't want to disappoint Javed*saab*.'

1984: *Mashaal* is released. And a star is born.

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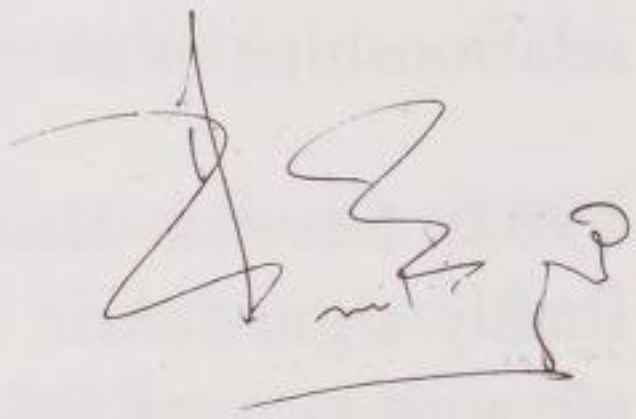
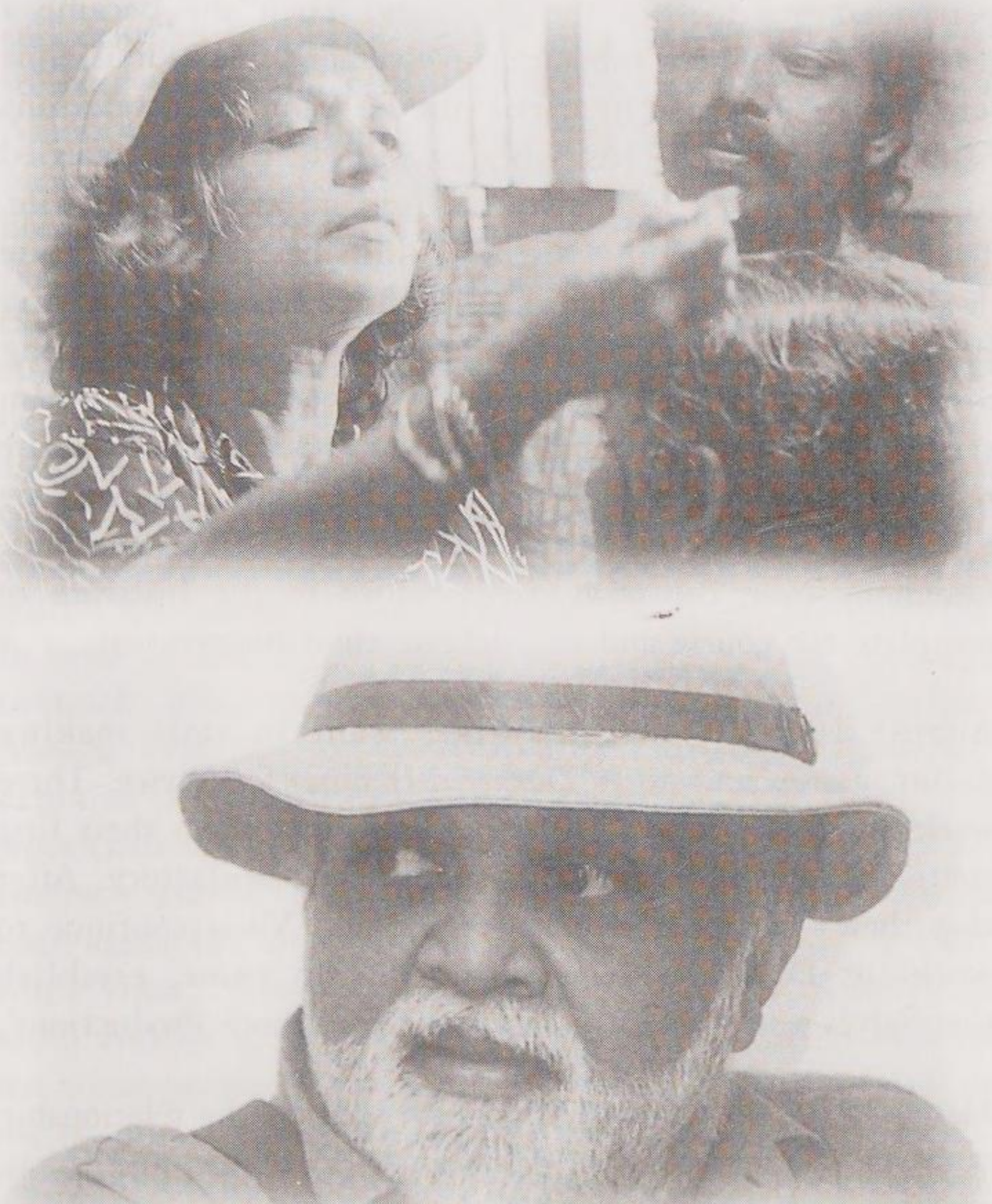
'The article was precious because it was my first cover story. I was so excited when I did the interview and later, when I first spotted the copy on the stands.'



(Anil Kapoor)

1984

ARUNA RAJE-VIKAS DESAI



Aruna Raje and Vikas Desai were India's first husband and wife directorial team. Now that they are splitting professionally, one looks back on their remarkable career.

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February 1969: These are Vikas Desai's last few days at the Film & Television Institute of India, Pune. Soon the large, chubby-faced student will be a full-fledged director, ready to face the future in Bombay's frenetically competitive film scene. He is eager to face the outside world, uneasy about leaving Aruna Patil behind. In the 18 months that he has known her, the two have grown closer and closer. At first, she was just the slim, pert daughter of some friends of his parents. She was all set to become a doctor when he persuaded her to join the Institute. Then she became a friend. Next, came a romantic involvement. Now, it is time for Vikas to leave and he is not sure he wants to leave Aruna behind. Suddenly, he has a brainwave. He will get married to Aruna and they will leave the Institute as man and wife. They will set a trend. Next morning, hasty postcards are despatched to both the families. 'Arrange wedding. Arriving Bombay soon.' Though the families had printed the wedding invitation cards, we made our own special ones on film strips. We had planned a formal wedding with the registration at Vikas's Peddar Road bungalow followed by the Vedic ceremony and reception at a marriage hall. Ceremony over, the newly-weds return to the Institute to complete the course and to celebrate their honeymoon.

August 1969: Aruna and Vikas want to start making documentaries and go to Durga*bai* (Khote) for advice. Three weeks later, she calls them home and gives them their first contract. The film turns out more than satisfactory. After that there's no looking back. Aruna and Vikas continue to work for Durga Films and in time to come, establish themselves as the main pillars of 'Durga Khote Productions'.

March 1970: An interesting script, based on the relationship between a father and son, was written by Aruna and Vikas, while still at the Institute. Today, they wonder if they can make a film of it. They decide they'll make a refreshing film, sign unconventional actors. For the father, they sign up Utpal Dutt and for the son, if you please, screenplay writer

and lyricist, Gulzar. The film is to be based on the Marathi theatre lifestyle. After months of preparation everything is ready. Then the producer comes and says he cannot manage the finances.

He promises to arrange finance in the following months, so for the next six months, Aruna and Vikas while away time. The producer does not return. In the meanwhile, Gulzar develops cold feet. 'People will throw stones at me,' he wails and withdraws from the contract. Only Jalal Agha who is to play a *paanwalla* remains enthusiastic. Every time Jalal meets the couple he chuckles and says, 'I'm preserving the utensils. Even if I'm to use them after a 100 months, I'll still do your film.' The film never gets made. Not even after 100 months.

February 1971: Girish Karnad wants Aruna-Vikas to edit his film, *Vamsha Vriksham*. The couple decide to get romantic and drive to Bangalore. On the way, Vikas dozes off at the steering wheel and the car meets with a severe accident. Aruna, who is knitting a sweater, feels the knitting needles pierce her face. Her legs are injured and the knees are bleeding. They are rushed to the hospital immediately. From the hospital they call Girish and inform him that they cannot edit his film and will he please arrange for somebody else. Girish insists he wants only them to edit his film and he is prepared to wait. A month later, when the sympathy and the pampering of friends and relatives subsides, the couple decide it's boring to be in bed without roses or telegrams. However, even though Vikas is hale and hearty with a few bruises, Aruna is in plaster and can hardly move. In spite of this, the two decide that they want to get down to work. They inform Girish Karnad about their arrival. '*Vamsha Vriksham* was literally edited from the wheelchair,' explains Aruna. 'They would gently lift me from the wheelchair and put me on the editing chair, where I worked tirelessly almost 12 hours a day. In the night, they would once again lift me from the chair and lay me on my bed.' Adds Vikas, 'When they realised it was getting difficult, to avoid further discomfort, they made arrangements to turn the accompanying room into a bedroom for us. This saved us the trouble of having to travel up and down from the hotel.' By the time the editing of the film is complete, Aruna's condition improves. She's got rid of the wheelchair and is walking around on crutches. The high point was that the film and Girish got National Awards and Aruna-Vikas bagged the State Award.

January 1972: The afternoon mail brings the Reader's Digest. A tired Aruna scans the magazine and is taken up by a real life story. In the evening Vikas reads the Digest and is stirred by the same subject. 'I was going to tell you the same thing,' says Aruna while serving dinner. 'Let's make a film on it', suggests Vikas. N. B. Kamat, a well-known producer and distributor is the dear friend, who's been wanting to produce a film for a long time. He is prepared to launch his new project but does not have sufficient money. So the three of them decide to split expenses. Aruna-Vikas and Kamath launch 'Avikram Productions'.

March 1973: Mehboob Studio. The first song of *Shaque* is recorded. The production problems have started already. The first disagreement between the producer and the director is regarding the casting of the hero. Vikas wants to sign Amitabh, then merely a struggler and Kamath says he will tear the contract if the lean, ugly, awkward man is signed for the film. 'Do you call him a hero? His face is repulsive.' Aruna sits in a corner eating fresh oranges (she is expecting her first baby) listening to the two of them fighting passionately. 'What about the heroine?' she asks. 'Why don't we settle on the heroine and later fight over the hero?' The choice is between Suchitra Sen, Madhabi Mukherjee and Waheeda Rehman. Vikas decides to meet all three of them. The next few weeks are spent in fixing appointments and meeting them to narrate the story idea. 'While I was sitting at home, my tummy growing heavier day by day, my husband was meeting these gorgeous women,' says Aruna. 'But boy! How exciting were those days,' reminisces Vikas. 'I was bowled over by all of them, especially Suchitra Sen. She sat like a regal queen looking at me with her almond eyes and I was like a little poodle before her.'

The regal queen refuses to do the film. She quotes a price the new producer cannot afford. On the other hand, Waheeda Rehman is more than eager. She rings up often to enquire about its development. In the meanwhile, Aruna delivers her baby and her attention for sometime is diverted to the home front. They name their daughter Gargi. It means someone who has come from the Ganga. 'Our first film was planned before our first baby but the baby came before the film,' laughs Vikas. During the same year, two more films are released, *Zanjeer* and *Phagun*. The first is a

superhit and the second is a super flop. Suddenly, Kamath has changed his mind about the hero. 'Actually, Amitabh suits the character,' he says. So Vikas goes to meet Amitabh and offers him *Shaque*. It's too late. His diary is full and there are no dates for the next three years. As for Waheeda Rehman, overnight there is a fall in her market. *Phagun*, has changed things professionally for her. One day she calls up on her own and says it's okay if they don't take her for the role but they must make the film. 'Don't risk your film with me. I'm a sunset star. Take a new star and make a great film.' She says this without bitterness but her words instil immense guilt in the new film-makers. However, for all the sentiment, the proposition of taking Waheeda is still not practical because by now they've more or less settled for Vinod Khanna as the hero and Waheeda would look too old with Vinod. So they need a younger, fresher face.

In the meanwhile, Vikas continues to return to the Institute from time to time. He is on the faculty, teaching acting. There is a face in the crowd that catches his attention. It's a face he likes immensely. Back home he tells his wife about the face. 'She is vivacious, spirited. We must sign her as the heroine of our film.' They do. Shabana Azmi is signed as the leading lady of *Shaque*. At last, the film is going on the floors. The enterprising directors have charted out alternate scenes in case the first day proves a rainy day. The shooting takes place in their uncle's house at Mahalaxmi. The lived-in house lends authenticity to the typical Maharashtrian characters. The approach is different from the other film makers. Aruna personally supervises the costumes, the curtains, the cushion covers and the tablecloth required on the sets. Together, the couple spends a lot of time with the actors. And in spite of all this, Vinod Khanna comes four hours late on the first day of shooting. 'I need to take a nap,' he says the minute he arrives and sleeps for over an hour. 'I'm hungry. I'll eat some food,' he says when he wakes up, so immediately somebody is rushing to get Vinod his food. 'Where are my clothes?' he asks next. So once again somebody is rushing to give him his clothes. It's 3 p.m. and half the day has been wasted. After what seems like ages, Vinod finally emerges from the room. He is surprised at the way everyone functions with minimum lights, minimum number of helpers. After the first few shots, Vinod can take it no longer. 'I have never worked with a unit like this

before. For the life of me I cannot understand what is happening. Let me go home early today. Please let me read the script and do my homework. I promise to report on time tomorrow.'

Next day Vinod is a changed man. He reports on time, concentrates on his lines, even offers suggestions and help. When he discovers that the Indian tape does not stick the wires well, he brings foreign tape from home. Till the completion of the film, his secretary does not talk about Vinod's payment or dates. During the dubbing, for one particular loop, Vinod gives 78 retakes. Shabana who is present in the auditorium, waiting for her turn covers her mouth and says, 'I cannot believe this is the same Vinod Khanna of other commercial films!'

August 1975: Aruna is expecting her second baby. They are hoping this time it will be a boy. 'It will complete the family.' Their wish is fulfilled. They name him Hith. It means 'goodness'...

November 1976: *Shaque* is complete. At last.

March 1977: They've found a chain of good theatres for the release of *Shaque*. In the first week itself there are all kinds of controversies. Bindu's poster holding the black bra creates traffic jams and the poster has to be replaced overnight. Vinod Khanna is confused with the feedback on the film. 'Are you sure this film is the same I shot for? What are these erotic love scenes everyone is talking about?' The film gets rave reviews and acclaim. 'A lot of people from the industry called to tell us that it was a great film, but unfortunately all the producers who came forward wanted us to make more *Shaques*. This is the kind of reaction we were expecting so we were prepared for it. We rejected all the offers. We didn't want to repeat ourselves. We'll make something new.' We decide, it doesn't work.

January 1978: No exciting offers are coming 'Avikram Productions' way and it's boring to wait endlessly. Eventually, they launch an action thriller which includes Zeenat Aman, Vinod Khanna and Reena Roy and the subject is contrary to *Shaque*. The only thing common between the two films are some erotic love scenes. 'The only thing we've worked out in detail about this film are the love scenes. When Zeenat Aman hears the details she gets equally excited. 'This is like a Hollywood film,' she says.

It is an expensive project and takes longer than intended. In the meanwhile, Aruna and Vikas decide to start a quickie called *Gehrayee* with Padmini Kolhapure, Indrani Mukherjee and Dr Sriram Lagoo. Inspired by a real life incident, the film is about *tantriks* and superstitions. It's about the harassing experience a family goes through because their 12-year-old daughter is possessed by an evil spirit and has to be exorcised. 'The only person we can think suits the role is Padmini Kolhapure. But her parents won't allow it. They don't want Padmini to miss her studies. It takes a lot of persuasion, but we finally succeed.'

After one month of start-to-finish shooting, *Gehrayee* is completed. While flying back from Bangalore, Aruna and Vikas meet Mrs Heinz (Zeenat's mother). 'Your film has gone,' she tells them. 'All those gorgeous love scenes will never be portrayed because Vinod Khanna is retiring from films. It is true. He has even started returning signing amounts.'

One more wonderful subject has gone down the drain. One more dream film has been shelved. The jinx is getting stronger. *Gehrayee* is ready and complete, except for the background music which is getting unnecessarily delayed. In the last year, only one song has been recorded. Laxmikant-Pyarelal have just no dates. There is nothing Aruna and Vikas can do, but wait endlessly.

As the months pass, the situation gets more and more helpless. After eight months of waiting, Laxmikant and Pyarelal are able to do merely two shifts of recording. Exasperated, Aruna and Vikas take their film back from the music directors. 'We decided to do our own music,' they explain. 'There was no other choice. In all, we had to do 65 pieces of background and at this rate our film would not be released for another five years.'

It wasn't difficult. Having been trained under the critical eye of veteran music director, uncle Vasant Desai, Aruna and Vikas have a natural ear for music. In fact, there were constant recitals at home on every occasion, especially during the Ganpati festival. So decide to create their own music. Finally, what could not be achieved in one year, is fulfilled within two months. A lot of time is saved. The film is complete with background music and sent for mixing.

February 1980: *Gehrayee* is released. Pyarelal, who had almost been in tears when the film was taken away from him, hugs Vikas and says, 'You've done a splendid job. Not being able to give you dates has been our loss.'

March 1981: F. C. Mehra contacts Aruna and Vikas. He wants to make a fast-spinning crime thriller with all the regular *masala*. The couple gets working on it immediately. As usual, they rush to Goa, book a room in Fort Aguada and begin to write their script. By the end of the month, everything to the smallest detail is worked out. On their return, husband and wife dash to Delhi for location hunting. However, one month later, they realise that the 'jinx' has only been bidding its time...

F. C. Mehra cannot produce the promised film. He feels that it isn't a good time for a crime thriller. He prefers making a love story instead. Besides, the Mehras want to pursue their own directorial venture this year. The idea of the crime thriller is buried and *Ek Jaan Hain Hum* starring Chimpu Kapoor is announced.

Aruna and Vikas feel defeated but cannot do anything about it. They keep themselves busy on the editing of Shekhar Kapur's *Masoom* not allowing the circumstances to dampen their spirit. At home, they write a naughty, sex comedy with Saeed Jaffrey and Sriram Lagoo in mind. It's a fast-paced, pulsating film but just when the project is about to commence, things go wrong. The novice producer gets disillusioned with the idea of making a subject on oldies and drops out at the eleventh hour.

Then one gloomy day, actor and junior colleague Vikram drop in to narrate an idea which has haunted him for years. He wants to turn producer. And he has the money.

March 1982: There are constant sittings at the Peddar Road flat. 'Are you sure you want to make the film?' they ask Vikram time and again. Vikram is obsessed with the idea and is sure it will turn into a good film. So, fired by his enthusiasm, the unit gets down to work. Shooting commences...

January 1983: Vikram runs out of finances. The film, nearly complete, has to be delayed. Another tragedy occurs. Gargi falls sick. The doctor says it is bone cancer. A heavy

depression looms over the house. The trauma is testing everybody. In the meanwhile, Vikram comes back to say he's finally arranged for the finance. 'As far as the delay of *Situm* goes, we've made 10 cancellations of Vikram's dubbing. And this was because Gargi was about to breathe her last.' The parents have told Gargi about her illness. She is taking it bravely. Her friends know it too. They come home every evening. Vikas and Aruna's friends come home often.

Vikram is more than supportive. 'Take your time, the film can wait,' he says. Gargi's doctor has given her only 10 days to survive and the parents want to spend every minute with her.

Unpredictably, the ten days stretch to 40. And guilt weighs heavy on Vikas' heart. After all, he cannot squander the producer's money. 'Why don't you go and dub for a few hours?' suggests Aruna. Reluctantly, Vikas agrees. Hardly does he leave home, then Gargi's health takes a serious turn. The little child has started going into a coma. She is sinking. Hysterical and uncontrolled, Aruna telephones the dubbing theatre. 'Ask him to come home immediately!' she screams. Vikas has just reached the theatre. He merely hears that there is a telephone from home and he turns immediately. Without waiting for the message, Vikas rushes to his car and races home. It is too late. When he reaches home, Gargi has closed her eyes. Gargi is no more.

July 1984: Sea Rock auditorium. The trial show of *Situm*. Today is a special screening for Gargi's teachers. Gargi has done a small role in the film and they want to see Gargi on screen. When the lights go out, Aruna tiptoes inside the theatre and quietly huddles in a corner. She's watched this film a number of times but today somehow it holds a special magic. Especially the scene where Arun Sarnaik talks to Smita seems a moment of deep revelation. 'I felt he was only talking to me, balming my wounds. Telling me gently to rise above death, face the situation. To learn to survive.' 'It's true', continues Vikas. 'The film has a deep philosophical effect on many people. It depends on how the person reacts to it. There are so many little little things we've tried to get across. Our heroine's pain, anguish, desire — in fact, all her complicated mixed emotions. I felt overwhelmed when a group of college boys told me that they felt grown up, wiser, after seeing the film. I take this as a compliment.'

'*Situm* is about life as it is,' continues Aruna. 'I like my work but cannot be objective about it. I like Smita's performance immensely. Smita herself likes the character she's played. In most other films if you lose a loved one, all you do is shed tears. In *Situm*, when Naseer dies, Smita goes through phases of changes. She is frightened, vulnerable, cold, cruel, bitter, guilt-ridden and finally helpless.'

There is an intense desire in the couple to talk about their deceased child... They discuss her as if she were alive. Aruna still refers to her children in the plural. Vikas, on the other hand seems more keen to forget the episode. Even the memory of it seems painful. Everytime Aruna brings up the topic, Vikas changes it. Now he begins discussing their career. 'We've decided to spilt professionally', announces Vikas, smiling broadly. 'Aruna and I both feel that it is more practical to work independently. Instead of suffering the brunt of every film together, we'd rather do it individually. Even money will come in better this way. Won't we be earning double?'

Aruna: Money is important, you know. We might have been able to give Gargi better treatment, if we had tonnes of money.

Vikas: I've decided to do a little bit of acting too, thanks to my wife who gave me my first break in *Situm*. I'm doing small roles in few other films which include *Sheeshey Ka Ghar, Andhi Gali* and *Anant Yatra*.

Aruna: As in the past I'll continue with my editing and writing. Right now I'm working on two films with Vijay Tendulkar, in both of which I'm doing the physical writing.

Vikas: So am I. One of my forthcoming films is also based on a script by Vijay Tendulkar and the other is in collaboration with Gulzar.

They're already busy with their individual schedules. Very often Aruna and Vikas sit in the same room writing their independent scripts and they seem happy. It's premature to predict whether their decision to split is right or wrong. As a team, they made refreshing directors. Actors loved working with them.

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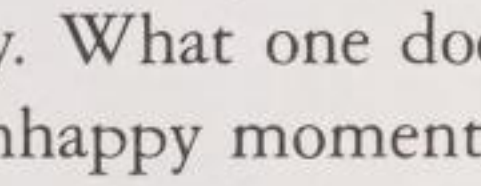
'Going back in time was like seeing an old movie which one had seen many times and which one knew well. It had romance and idealism and it had pathos. It turned out to be a tear-jerker of a tragedy. Today, having come to terms with life and being at peace with oneself, the perspective is quite different. There is one puzzle that I have never been able to solve. Was the man whom one had fallen in love with and adored and who reciprocated manifold, the real Vikas or the one who emerged at the time of crisis — selfish, heartless and humiliating the woman he had loved, the real one? Had one projected ones own wishful thinking, bestowing non-existent qualities upon the man in happier times while he had played along enjoying the adoration, exposing his true self only in the crisis, which one had finally seen, rendered less blind in times of agony? Anyway, today it is only a matter for analysis and character study. What brought back the pain and the tears was remembering those times with my daughter, Gargi. It is said that time heals. No, it doesn't. You just get used to living with it. Even after 18 years, I'm surprised that it hurts like it were yesterday. What one does achieve over the years is to privatise one's unhappy moments, vulnerabilities and face the world like any other normal person. I have said this before and I will say it now, that I have had the rare opportunity/fortune or misfortune, to have led two lives in the same lifetime. So much about me was different then and so much is different now. But whatever it may be, my life has been enriched and I have grown from that romantic, idealistic girl to a compassionate, mature woman.'



(Aruna Raje-Patil)

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'I am of the opinion that certain chapters should be best left closed.'

(Vikas Desai)

1984

DANNY DENZONGPA

Dzongrilla. Juhu. The watchman lets me in through the main entrance without a question. He has been informed about my arrival. Inside, his dog, a Dalmatian, leads me to the living room and stands wagging its tail until I settle down on the pistachio green settee from Sikkim. The house is spotlessly clean and orderly, not even a coaster is out of place. Ten minutes later, Danny enters. 'Without my cigarette packet beside me, I can't even breathe', he tells me. During the two hour interview, he smokes more than six cigarettes but makes sure he does not spill ash on the carpet. He is houseproud. Leads a disciplined life. Even if you are likely to be 10 minutes late, he expects you to inform him. He is articulate and easy. His memory is infallible. He's able to recall with exactness all that happened 20 years ago. Not once during his long trek down memory lane, does he falter...

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1964; Yuksum Village: I'm in the final year of college and dream of joining the army because I admire the discipline it imposes. My mother hears of my dangerous decision and goes on a hunger strike. These are the days of the Chinese aggression and she is worried about my safety. Finally like any good son, I give into my mother's pressure. I forget about the army.

Then one day at a friend's house, when I'm flipping through the pages of a Hindi magazine, 'Madhuri', I see an advertisement inviting applications for the Film Institute. If I can't join the army, my second preference is to sing and dance. The same evening, I post an application to Pune.

The audition is in Calcutta. The date for the interview is April 29. My last exam gets over on the 28th. Immediately after my paper I rush home, collect my suitcase and rush to the station to catch the only train which leaves during the day. My brother, who is studying Law in Calcutta, comes to fetch me at the station. There is no time to go home and change so we go directly for the audition. I'm told only one candidate out of the many hundreds present, will be chosen. Three weeks later, I realise I'm the lucky one.

1968; Pune: It's my first day at the Film Institute. Nobody is willing to share a room with me — everyone feels I look

like a Chinese. Till late evening, I wait outside the warden's office, my suitcase, beside me. Finally, at 8 p.m. I find a partner. Our problems are similar. We're both outsiders. We shake hands and decide to become friends. In the months that follow, we turn friends. The senior students still keep ragging us.

One afternoon, Navin Nischol and Jalal Agha ask me to carry their bedding for them. Exasperated, I turn around and tell them that I shouldn't be harassed, because, after all, I'm a foreigner and a guest in their country. There must have been something compelling about my expression, because after that they leave me alone.

At the inaugural function, all the senior students sit on stage while the juniors come up one by one and introduce themselves, 'I am Tsering Phintso Denzongpa,' I say into the microphone. There is a roar of laughter in the auditorium. They've never heard a more amusing name, and I'm asked to repeat it until everyone can get it right. They don't. Even months later my colleagues call me either '*Suno...*' 'Hey you...'or '*Abe o...*' Eventually, Jaya Bhaduri decides to change it to a simpler sounding Danny. It's a vague, Catholic sounding name, but I accept her suggestion. At least, it's better than being called '*Abe o...*'.

During the lectures I sit alone on the last bench. The other boys prefer to huddle up on the bench ahead of me, rather than share mine. Jaya and Yogesh are the only two people who don't mind sitting next to me. From everyone else in the class, I sense negative vibrations. To a great extent this prejudice is because of the Chinese aggression on India. I don't let that dampen my spirit. Unlike Nohsie.

Nohsie is a *Naga* friend I make in the neighbouring Law College hostel. Once, some people on the road throw stones at Nohsie and follow him with slogans of '*Chini dushman...*' After this incident, sensitive Nohsie turns a recluse. He sits all day in his room, brooding over his appearance. It's only after weeks of counselling, that I finally get him out of his depression.

The results are announced — I stand first in the class. Jaya stands second. This is a new phase for me. Suddenly, everyone wants to be my room-mate. I'm invited to all the

parties, included in all the pranks... Six of us jump onto a motorbike and go for speedy rides around the city, tease girls, eat ice-cream.

1969: This is my second year and more marks are set aside for the practicals. All of us try and act in as many films as possible, but the choice isn't ours. It's up to the director. Jaya gets the maximum number of films. After her comes Mukesh, then Anil Dhawan. I have no films. I go to professor Taneja and complain that no director is casting me in his film. He pacifies me and promises to do something. It's a phase when the Government is all out to promote colour films, and fortunately for me, they've donated a few reels to the Film Institute which Mr. Taneja decides to use on me. Their only condition is that we should complete the shooting in one day.

Next morning we get cracking. We rehearse the scenes all day and leave the final shooting for the evening. At 5 p.m. professor Taneja goes for his cup of tea. Jaya, my heroine, goes for a stroll. I'm in the studio reading my lines. Suddenly, our cameraman, Gandhi, comes to me and says, 'I can't shoot anymore. I'm tired.' I implore Gandhi to cooperate because my life depends on this film. But he won't listen. I get so worked up, that I strike him. When friends try to intervene, I push them away. By this time, professor Taneja hears the commotion and arrives. He fires both of us and sends us to our respective rooms. In my room, I cry till fury takes over self-pity. I'm so angry that I want to murder Gandhi. I grab a stick and go to his room. He's not there. Anticipating trouble, he has slipped down the building pipe and booked himself into a neighbouring hotel.

The film does not get completed. As predicted, I don't stand first. I stand second. I send Jaya a warm telegram, 'You deserve it.' When she meets me she says, 'You deserve it too.' In retrospect, I feel that not winning the gold medal has proved to be blessing in disguise. The burden of the medal would have been too much.

1970: A few of our friends have already started shooting. Jaya is shooting for *Guddi* with Hrishikesh Mukherjee. Anil Dhawan is shooting for *Chetna* with B. R. Ishara. I often visit their sets with friends and sit long hours watching them work. It feels good. Somehow, it seems like ours is a lucky batch... Everyone seems to get a good break.

1971: At a friend's house. Every morning I take a train from Dadar and go on my rounds to producer's offices. I go to the same offices, meet the same people, show the same photographs, say the same lines. 'Give me a break. I'm good.' None of the producers I meet give me a break. In the evening, I even eat the same dinner... *vada paav*, at the station. At night, I'm harassed by recurring nightmares of returning home, because I could not get any films. I'm frightened of being a failure. When I go to Pune, I tell professor Taneja about my fears. He tells me not to worry. 'You are good, a time will come when more and more people will recognise talent and not run after mere looks.' His words encourage me and for the moment, I feel happy.

As months pass, however, my confidence diminishes. Six months later, I return to Pune again, tell Taneja*saab* of my decision to pack up. He is angry with me for being a pessimist. 'When I have faith in you, why can't you have faith in yourself? Trust me, when I say, something good will happen. It has to happen.' To dissuade me from the decision, he suggests I start assisting him in teaching at the Institute. This way I earn pocket money besides getting the weekend off to return to Bombay and hunt for work.

1972; Famous Studio, Mahalaxmi: Mukesh and I go on our daily rounds in his car. Once we reach the studio, we go our separate ways, deciding to meet after a few hours to discuss our luck. It's one such Friday, when I'm going down the staircase, that I suddenly spot B. R. Ishara leafing through a book at the bookstall near the main gate. Since Anil has introduced me to him on the sets of *Chetna*, I decide to greet him. He looks up, startled. 'I'm Danny', I tell him hesistantly. There is a long pause as he stares at me. I wonder if he's trying to place me. Suddenly, he shuts the book and exclaims, 'But I've been looking for you everywhere. Good heavens, where have you been hiding? I want to offer you the lead in my next film.' Dazed, I stare at him. I don't believe him until he narrates the script that same evening at character artiste Asit Sen's house. The film is *Nayi Duniya Naye Log* with a cast of newcomers. Within a few days, we leave for the outdoor location to Bangalore. We go by car. On the front seat is the driver, the producer and I. Behind us, my leading lady Reena Roy, her sister Barkha and mother. Time and again, during the long journey I try to snatch a wink. I can't. Reena and her sister giggle

continuously. They are so ignorant that the simplest of things amuse them greatly. Later, when we stop for lunch, I remove my sunglasses for the first time. Reena stares at me as if she's seen a ghost. '*Are yeh to* Chinese *hai*' she yells out to Barkha. Her mother slaps her. They expect me to be offended. I'm not. Reena's ignorance amuses me. In fact, I've not been entertained thus in a long time. I'm embarrassed because I cannot stop laughing. I run behind a bush, flop onto the ground and laugh till I've composed myself. When I feel I'm in control, I return to the car.

In a way, the incident breaks the ice. Also, in its own way, it's the beginning of a friendship with Reena which grows as we sign more films together. Unfortunately, *Nayi Duniya Naye Log* never gets released but the director repeats me in his next film, *Zaroorat*. I love the character I play in *Zaroorat*. Even years later, when I watch the film, I find my performance convincing — natural, consistent and most important, without an image.

Mere Apne is a film I get because of a letter to Gulzar. He tells me frankly that both the leading roles are committed to Shatrughan Sinha and Vinod Khanna. 'Out of the remaining roles you choose one.' All the remaining roles are insignificant. As a compromise, I agree to do the part of the boy who gets bashed up. It's a small role, but when I go to see the film in the theatre, people recognise me. This is the first time I realise that no matter how insignificant my role, I will always be noticed because I look different. I begin to see the positive side of my unusual appearance.

I return home for a holiday. This is my first visit after joining films and I realise that suddenly everything has changed. Nobody, except my parents call me by my original name. All my cousins, nephews, nieces, the neighbours and the shopkeepers call me Danny. It's odd, hearing that name, because deep inside I've still not gotten used to it.

1973; B.R. Chopra's Bungalow: Chopra*saab* had promised me a break when the right role came by. One morning I go to his house to remind him about it. He is in the middle of a discussion when I enter the room, but he tells me that he hasn't finalised the casting yet. 'Would you be interested in listening to the script?' he asks me casually. I'm flabbergasted. Why should an important man like him want

to narrate his script to a nobody like me? But that's Chopra*saab*. He is interested in opinions of all kinds of people. I'm ushered into a luxurious air-conditioned room where a group of people are waiting comfortably.

The film is *Dhund*. 'Who is doing the husband's role?' is my first question to Chopra*saab*. His answer is Amitabh Bachchan. Since the location is to be a hill station, he feels I'm the appropriate choice to play the police inspector. I disagree. 'I want to play the husband', I insist. 'You are too young', he tells me politely, then changes the topic. Around this time, *Parwana* is released. Suddenly Amitabh is having second thoughts about playing negative roles and he withdraws from the film. The next choice is Shatrughan Sinha. Fortunately for me Shatrughan and the Chopras don't agree on the price. Now the choice is Madan Puri or me. Everyone in the unit is in favour of Madan Puri. Their explanation is Puri*saab* can look evil, and more important, he is more saleable.

I contact Pandhari *dada* and get him to do my get-up. Next, I rummage my cupboards for old jackets and faded scarves. After this, I go to Chopra*saab*'s office. He nods at me approvingly. 'Very good, but I still feel you look very young.' I'm heartbroken. As I'm leaving, I decide to cast the last dice. 'Give me just one chance', I tell him. 'You shoot just one scene with me. If after this, you still find me dissatisfactory, then I will agree to playing the inspector's role.' He agrees. It's a deal. They give me a simple scene with very little dialogue. When the shot is over, I'm too nervous to look up for reactions. Then suddenly from behind the camera, I hear a voice...'Next shot please...' We continue shooting throughout the day. It's an unforgettable moment for me.

According to the original script, my character does not come on the screen until the interval. An idea flashes across my mind. I want the director to incorporate just one extra scene, a scene where I throw a plate into the camera. Everyday I make it a point to remind Mr. Chopra of this shot and everyday he shoos me away with some excuse or the other. I realise I'm being a pest, but I cannot help it. Then one day we pack up early. Chopra*saab* and Sanjay Khan are going location scouting for the next day's song picturisation. I follow him to the car and say, 'Chopra*saab* what about my

shot? Exasperated, he yells out to his cameraman Dharam Chopra, 'Allow this boy to do what he wants, but finish it before I get back.' Before I give the shot, I've decided on two things. One, that my expression will be sinister. Two, that I'll throw the plate with tremendous anger. I throw the plate vigorously. It breaks into six pieces. When the shot is over, Dharam*ji* s instant reaction is, '*Ladka pagal hai!*'

It's only during the editing of the film, that everyone realises what a good shot that was. I'm summoned from my shooting to come and see my spark of brilliance. To this day, Chopra*saab* gives me full credit for the shot and even makes it a point to tell everyone so.

1974; Shivaji Park: I'm staying in a rented flat at Cadell Road. Every morning, strangers come to meet me. *Dhund* has not yet been released but the screenings have begun. As the word by mouth publicity spreads in the trade circle, my house gets flooded with more and more people. By the time the film is released, the house resembles a railway platform. I appoint a secretary, Madan. Now Madan decides on my films, organises my dates, my appointments. It's a relief not having to worry about futile meetings. The first flush of success is evident. I buy my first car, Ford. I'm shooting every day.

The following years are packed with releases like *Chor Machaye Shor, Kalicharan, Fakira, Dharmatma, Kala Sona.* A couple of hits, a couple of flops. One day I get a letter from Nohsie, my Institute friend. It's a warm letter which I've preserved to this day. He writes, 'Once upon a time, everywhere we went people called us 'Chinese', today wherever we go, people call us 'Danny'.

1975; Juhu: I shift into my two-bedroom flat in Kalumal Estate. It's my first property after coming to Bombay. Not that I was unhappy earlier, but now I feel a kind of mental peace. It's like finding your roots. Also, gradually, I make few good friends. N. N. Sippy is one such friend. He is planning his next film. It's the remake of a Telugu hit and the cast is more or less decided, except for the police inspector. We think of several actors but somehow nobody seems appropriate. As usual an impatient Sippy suggests that I play the role. It's a role which progresses from youth to old age. The film is *Devta*. The critics love my performance.

'Filmfare' nominates me for the best character artiste award which I eventually lose to Saeed Jaffrey for *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*.

This is the beginning of my silver wig phase.

1976; Kashmir Outdoor Locations: These days the only roles I'm offered are those of old or ageing men. During the shooting, when my make-up man fixes the grey and white wigs on my head, I feel like hitting everybody. In the evening, after pack-up, I put on my shorts and go jogging. I laugh at the irony of life. There, I smoke a pipe, carry a walking stick. Off-screen, I play squash and dream of buying a yacht. I buy my second car, Datsun.

1977; Filmistan Studio: I'm bored with my monotonous routine. I'm bored with wigs and make-up. In every film I play either an old man or bad man. During one particular phase I feel I'm always playing a *daku*. I go for shootings wearing a black kurta, a moustache and *tilak* on my forehead. In the afternoon, I go for my second shift with almost identical clothes. I say almost the same dialogues to the same faces. Even the sets are similar. Day after day it's a repeat performance. Depression engulfs me. Am I enjoying what I'm doing? I'm not. I'm miserable. I decide it's time for a break. I cut down on my films so that I find enough time to launch into direction.

1978; Home: I've announced my first directorial venture, *Phir Wohi Raat*. At last, my routine is not monotonous. I don't apply make-up. I don't go on the sets where I play a *daku*, villian or grandfather. I sit in my air-conditioned room and work on my script. Direction is a difficult job. But I love it. I love anything that is different, adventurous. Unfortunately, the film does not do great business. But it isn't a flop the way people make it out to be. When the film is over, however, there is no feeling of satisfaction in me. This is not the kind of film I want to make. I want to make a good film, an original film and to do that I discover one needs to produce one's own film. Next time, I decide, I will make my kind of a film. But before I do that I need to take a long, long rest.

1979: I have fewer films. While I was busy on my project, I had cut down on my acting assignments. There is a sudden slump in my career. It's a brief phase. Gradually, offers start

filtering in and the cycle restarts. Still, all the shootings don't begin immediately. I have lots of time on hand and I use it constructively. I learn horse riding, dabble in business. During the emergency, I had bought a huge plot of land from a friend. Now in my free time, I start building my dream bungalow. When the construction is half complete my mother comes to supervise it. It coincides with her medical treatment in Bombay. She stays with me for two months, then decides to return to the hills. She can't stay here for too long. She can't get used to the faces, the language and the weather.

1980: I've begun shooting but I'm not busy every day. These days I shoot 15 days a month on an average. It's during this phase that I decide to learn music. I purchase *tablas*, a *harmonium*, a *tanpura*. I hire a master and begin and end my day with raagas. Every visitor to the house is forced to sit through my torturous music recital. As days pass, I get busier, my love affair with music cools off. Still, it isn't as if the learning has gone to waste. Years later, I cut two discs for HMV. One, my film songs, the other, Nepali folk music.

1981: I'm engulfed in work. This time I don't mind the monotony. Once you break away from the routine, you begin to cherish it. As you grow older, your quest for excitement diminishes. I no more grumble about my work even though the cycle is so mechanical after so many years. I sign a film. I shoot for it. I go for the premiere. Now somehow no role, no film gets me as easily charged as it did some years ago. Probably it's because, as the years go by, I'm turning more professional and less emotional. Also, somehow the ultimate fate of the film does not seem paramount. I feel it's more important to enjoy the process of working, to like and respect the people I work with. Money after a while does not give you happiness.

At dusk, sometimes, when I'm returning from work, my depression returns. Something pricks me at the core of my being. At that time, I feel the urgent need to make one more film. But before I do, I've to groom myself to become a producer.

1982: I shift to my new bungalow, Dzongrilla. In the beginning, just my bedroom and living room are ready. Gradually, the rest of the house gets furnished. In a way, building a house is like making a film. Every corner, every

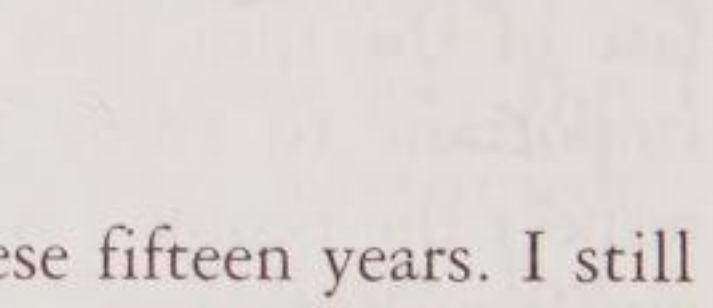
item needs special attention. I often change the decor to suit my whims and fancies. Very often, I juggle the furniture, cushion covers and shift ashtrays, from one table to another. I want to dispose of my old car but my secretary won't let me. He says it brought me luck so I should preserve it forever.

1983: After a long time I'm doing a film which has got me excited. *Kanoon Kya Karega*. Even before I begin shooting for the film, I'm certain it's going to create a stir. It does. The controversies multiply by the time the film is due for release. It's the phase of Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri. The era which Taneja*saab* had predicted years ago, has come at last! Today, a good actor is more important than a good-looking man. Maybe, I came at a wrong time. If I had come now, I too would have been heralded the way Nasseruddin Shah and Om Puri are. Maybe, I too would have won international acclaim. But there are no regrets. What I could not achieve, Naseer and Om have.

1984: Most visitors to the house are surprised that a bachelor pad like mine, is scrupulously clean. 'Without a woman in the house, how do you manage?' they ask. My answer is, 'I'm an orderly person'. These days I often think of marriage. But I don't want to marry in a hurry. By temperament, I'm too independent to be tied down. If the woman I marry is too demanding, I'll feel suffocated. So, before I plunge into the decision, I'd like to be certain that she is the right person. For once I marry her, I know I will never have flings. I'll be a faithful husband like my father was to my mother.

❀❀

'I haven't changed all that much in these fifteen years. I still feel nostalgic and emotional when I talk about my home town. It's simplicity and innocence is touching I was more bohemian then in my lifestyle. I've become more conservative and stable now. Coming from the hills, the climate here was always a problem. It continues to be a problem even now. Bombay films have continued to intrigue me after all these years.'



(Danny Denzongpa)

1984

MEENA KUMARI

When Meena Kumari died, she willed her diaries for friend and writer-director Gulzar. There are stories that the writer is compiling her incomplete jottings into a book aptly titled Pal Chhin in her memory. However, it's something Gulzar is not too keen on discussing. 'A memory as special should be preserved as precious ...' he says rummaging through the yellow pages of the tattered notebook. Translated from the original with impressions of the film-maker.

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On a white bed lies a body
they've forgotten to bury it
they've gone away
when they return
they see,
recognise, bury it
then I can breathe.

In the moments when she was dying, in those very moments, she lived with greater intensity.

If the issue isn't the body,
if it isn't the soul,
then what is it?
Ah! but I cannot bear it.
Again, it's the same intensity.
Holding drops of your phone conversation in my palm,
I sit wordless.
Wonder struck.
What is it, in my hands, what is this?
It is only you, just you, who gives...
continues to give, every breath, every moment
and I don't tire of asking.
All night long, it felt as if I had sent away
someone who belonged here, at home.
And shut myself in.

This weary one of yours — take care of her...
This weary one of yours — take care of her...
Till her last breath.

She was highly intuitive. There was always this strong, urgent cry in her that something was going to happen. And

it did. That is why, probably, she had guessed that death was near.

I am exhausted. Very exhausted... Panting.
That is why perhaps, it feels as if
these are the last few breaths that I drag...

Many incidents, she mentioned in the book were in fact her moods and moments of her life.

Memories, scattered everywhere.
Dust settled on every trail
Wherever I pass — they struggle up from their knees,
spread out around me, and then, I can see only them.
Isn't it nice?
Everywhere lies a little bit of oneself...
And then the journey this morning.
Allah! bas, *again and again, you come to my mind.*
Uff! *you would have liked it so much!*
If only you had seen it.
A morning like this?
That very mist — the one you wrote about.
An alive, breathing mist.
Did you meet one before?
So deep. So far.

On the paths, in the bastis, *lingering over the trees... seemed like*
we were passing ethereal dwellings.
Couldn't see the earth. Bas, with eyes half-closed,
dwellings seek me out through the mist...
They take deep drawn breaths, these trees, their branches.
Many, many years ago, returning from the Deccan,
I met the night of the fireflies laid out on the roads.
As far as the eye could see
weighing down on the trees, the branches.
We park the car on the side, switch off the lights.
Uff! *Even the stars are never that way!*
That night of the fireflies.
I found it accidentally, just lying on the road.
you haven't met her, have you?
That heavenly night was mine.
This heavenly morning is yours.
Your white veiled bride.
Like we kiss on the brow, just like that.

And I, like Masoom Miya,
just hold my head up and gape, astonished.

Wherever she went, she carried her diaries with her. And wrote in them incessantly, in between shots.

Today, I didn't do anything.
Last night, I had thought I'd stay awake all night.
and see the sunrise. But I slept on.
Kochi didn't wake me, and see, there was no sun today.
All day it rained.
All day there were clouds, that's why perhaps,
I have a mild fever.
Just here outside the hotel, I saw a branch,
an odd-shaped branch.
On my way back, if I can manage it,
I will bring it back with me...
There are clouds. It is cold.
It is Friday.
Last night, on the deserted road, the three of us
walked far and quietly.
I even took off my slippers, for fear that the sound of my footsteps
might injure the night.
Honest, why this distaste for noise?
When neighbours talk, I fume.
Just to walk like this, I have come to Mahableshwar.
Just to see the sky — see the stars.
In Bombay, they are never like this.
They are dusty, unclean, except for those we see walking around
— (to this you can add... I shall not
comment)...
That lake — (In the night oh... the face of the lake —
when I translated your nazm for Yahudan, she was left
gasping.
It was beautiful.
This mountain is beautiful, really...
And I've come to it after fourteen years.
And again, when I return to it, I will be alone.
No servants, no friends, no one.
But that future?
Really unknown, alone.
There should be a mountain. That's all.

In spite of having everything, Meena*ji* could not overcome her loneliness, or you could say that she couldn't get away

from herself... She could not surrender herself to someone. Even when she received love, all she said was...

It is feeling very good.
But why does it feel as if just the last few breaths remain?
You people have fussed over me so, isn't it? That is why!

When she reciprocated, she could never completely fathom her feelings and often questioned its origin. On one of the pages of the same notebook, she has written somewhat strangely...

Life is a crossroad where travellers meet and on meeting part.
Ah Khuda, *I only ask for this, whatever he gives,*
like always, may he give the strength to bear it.
That's all — we should bear it...
All of us! You — are you the crossroad?
Or are you life...?
But you are not the traveller... No?
Trust me, at least today,
this moment — my eyes see simple — straight
No worry, no pain — nothing.
I'm fine
It is okay, what will happen, will happen.

In retrospect, I feel, Meena*ji* seldom wrote poems that went out of character. She wrote exactly the way she felt and spoke. Like herself...

Search.
What they call search
it never ends
wherever one goes
one continues to walk...
Went to the lake — last evening
the lights had gone out
the entire mountain was sheathed in darkness.
Ah! it was beautiful.
On the way, I stopped the car, in the darkness.
It felt so tranquil
darkness... silence... peace!
We do not seek
we pick, collect and...
what do I want to free myself from?
Where do I want to go?

I don't know. I don't.
What I feel I cannot say.

She developed a phobia for noise, for brightness... She once confessed in a moment of despair:

If I close my eyes, the brightness burns me.
Oh! Lift me please, and lay me on velvet darkness.
This explosion of light, might blind me.

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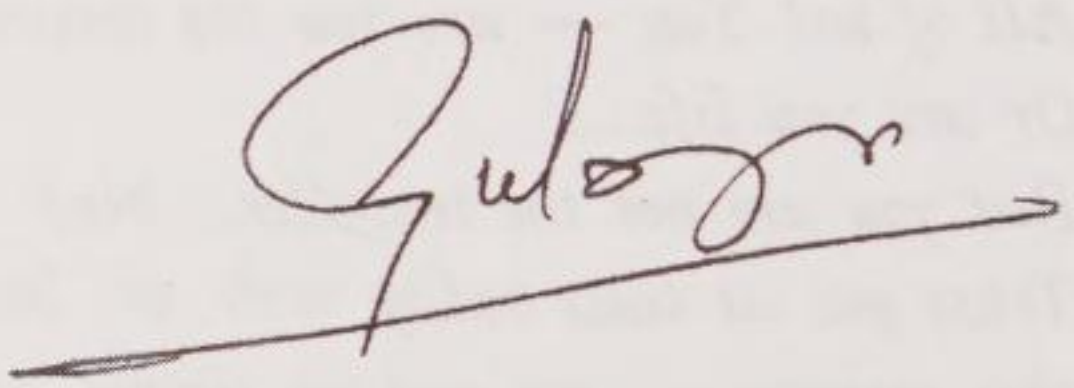
'There was a lot of pain in Meena*ji*'s writings... She may not have been exactly prolific, but her writing had a rhythm which was completely original.'



(Gulzar on Meena Kumari)

1985

SRIDEVI

It's 6 a.m. in the deluxe suite of Sea Rock Hotel. Sridevi, today's most sought after female star, is being awakened by the shrill, persistent rings of her telephone. It's the hotel reception reminding her that another day of hard work awaits her. If only she could enjoy a complete day of rest! Her eyes still half-shut, she squints at her younger sister Lata, smiling in her sleep. Maybe Lata is dreaming some beautiful dreams herself. As a child, Sridevi dreamt of flowers and fairies. But these days, all she dreams of is dates, dates, dates.

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'All I see are reflectors and cameras in my sleep,' she says. Not surprising considering Sridevi is shooting more than 12 hours a day. In fact, she confesses, 'It seems as if I return to my hotel room only to bathe and sleep.' Maybe that is why Sridevi wakes up tired. She tosses and turns in her bed, trying to sleep just a little while longer, but she can't. She watches her mother in the far corner, lost in deep slumber. Her curly hair which has been left loose for the night, seems like a black net on the white pillow. Sridevi knows that she resembles her mother and figures that years later she will look like her, probably even sleep in the same way. The bed next to her mother's is vacant. As usual, Aunty has risen early.

In a curtain-drawn room, Aunty tiptoes, getting Sridevi's paraphernalia ready for the day's shooting. She removes Sridevi's outfit from the cupboard, fills the ice bucket with Bisleri water and fruits, checks the make-up tray, takes out the vitamin bottles, and finally at 6.30, gently strokes her niece's head and cajoles her to wake up. It takes Sridevi only 10 minutes to bathe. She returns looking fresh, dusted with talcum powder, wearing a maroon petticoat, blouse with a chiffon *dupatta* draped over it in the South Indian fashion.

In the quiet of the dawn, the two women communicate silently. Aunty pours out some Bournvita, which Sridevi gulps down while brushing her knotted hair. 'She's never drunk either tea or coffee and does not know what it tastes like,' Aunty informs me proudly. 'Sri does not particularly care for soft drinks either.' Then what does Sri drink I inquire? 'When I'm thirsty, I drink gallons of water. Otherwise I stick to milk,' Sridevi tells me self-consciously.

Contrary to her on-screen persona, she is not a talkative person. In fact, she does not open up unless you assault her with questions. Only seldom does she answer out of turn, as she does just now, while pushing aside the heavy curtains of the antechamber: 'This Bombay climate is very bad. My face and arms are constantly breaking into a rash. Do other actresses face a similar problem?' Her make-up man Bhaskar arrives. He helps her with the cosmetics — the rouge, lipstick and pancake foundation which Sridevi dabs quickly, expertly on her face. They work silently, in perfect coordination. In a way, Bhaskar is Sridevi's confidant and has learnt, in the seven years he's been with her, to serve the actress without questions. He has learnt to adjust to her moods, to decipher her expressions. He sounds almost paternal when he says, 'If Sri gets angry, she turns violent. She does not say a word, but throws around every single article she finds in the room. During such moments all of us leave her alone.' And yet, nothing comes in the way of her professionalism, he claims, neither emotional stress nor physical exhaustion. 'Even if she's had a late night she will not sleep an extra hour because Sri hates being late.'

At 8 a.m. sharp, Kukie Malhotra, Sridevi's dress designer is flabbergasted to find Sridevi ready to try on the umpteen costumes. They are rushed for time, so they discuss her other outfits on the long drive to Chandivali studio. 'What do you call that ornament one wears on the head?' Sri asks Kukie. *'Singoda'*, informs Kukie. *'S-i-n-g-o-d-a,'* Sri repeats after her, amused by the sound of it. 'It's a funny name, isn't it? You people use funny nicknames here. Everybody adds *ji* while addressing people. I'm learning Hindi these days. I'm already familiar with the names of most of the studios... Chandivali, Filmistan, Filmcity. Am I pronouncing the names right?' she asks turning to us. 'Initially I was very tickled to hear everybody refer to Rajesh Khanna as *'Kaka'*. Now I'm comfortable calling him thus, though the name still sounds amusing — *ka-ka* means crow in Tamil. What I haven't got used to yet are the studio conditions in Bombay. Our studios down South are very clean and more spacious. There are some similarities. Nobody gives you your lines, the previous day. I'm nervous when I'm handed a one-page dialogue just 20 minutes before the shot. I'm not comfortable with the language and it takes some time to learn my lines. I prefer not having visitors when I'm

shooting a 'difficult' scene. Fortunately, today she's only got a dance scene lined up for Ravi Tandon's new film. P. L. Raj, the dance director, shows her the steps which she copies effortlessly. After a few rehearsals, Sri is ready for the take. An hour later, lunching in her room with sister Lata, she is bubbly and relaxed. Sridevi eats distractedly. From time to time she stares at her reflection. 'People are surprised when I tell them I'm a non-vegetarian, I don't know why? Is it because of the general impression that all South Indians are vegetarians? I enjoy eating non-veg food, but that does not mean I don't like *idlis*. I eat all kinds of food, and I'm hungry all the time. I've never exercised or been on a diet. I think it's becoming fashionable to be on a diet. It's becoming fashionable to eat boiled food. I cannot fathom how it happens, but my weight fluctuates from day to day. On Saturday I'm fat. On Monday I look slim. I'll never allow myself to become as fat as I was during *Himmatwala*, even though everyone I meet tells me that I looked better with the puppy fat.'

It's an exceptionally hot afternoon and she is uncomfortable in her nylon costume and tonnes of jewellery. Each time there is a break, she pulls off the heavy earrings and covers her ears gently with her hands. I tell her that she looks like a little child when she does that. She stares at me disbelievingly, her bright eyes flashing, and then says, 'Do you know that a certain magazine said I'm 28 years old and Jaya Prada is 35? What exaggeration!'

As the day progresses, Sri partially loses her inhibitions. She talks more freely, though she still has to be provoked with questions. A constant stream of visitors drop in to see her. A photographer wants to click her pictures. A reporter wants to interview her. A producer wants to narrate a story to her. Another producer wants to take an appointment for a story sitting. Every half-an-hour, somebody informs her that she's wanted on the telephone. Most of the time it is Bhaskar who answers, since the booth is far away. Rekha, happens to be shooting in the same studio and comes over for a gab session.

At dusk, more than half the unit packs up. But not Sri. She is required to stay on for a night sequence. She flops on the chair and exclaims, 'I'm so tired.' It will be an hour before Sri is required on the sets. She stretches her legs on a bed

and closes her eyes. After a while she sits up, and smiling broadly says, 'Ask me all your questions. Tell me, what do you want to know?'

A little about yourself, your childhood, parents and career?

'My father does not care for the typically commercial films. He prefers me in different type of films like, *Sadma* and *Jaag Utha Insaan*. He didn't want me to become an actress. Before he retired he was an advocate. A sober man, he'd have preferred me to be an advocate too. I was a very withdrawn, unusually sensitive child. Always frightened and I'd react to the smallest noise with a start. Always found trailing my mother, holding her saree *pallu* in my mouth. I don't know when and how things changed. An unreasonable childhood memory is of me dining at a restaurant. Suddenly I stopped eating, got up from my chair, walked to the dais where the band was playing and started dancing. I remember I wouldn't stop dancing till my father pulled me away and brought me back to my chair. My family must have been awfully embarrassed watching me go berserk. But I was too young to know what I was doing.

'Then one fateful day some strangers came home and proposed that I act in a film. My father was offended and sent them away. But they came again the next day, and pestered my mother to force my father into changing his mind. My mother was ambitious for me. And she had her way. The next day at the shooting, I saw Sowcar Janaki. I liked her shimmery clothes and jewellery. My first film was shot inside a temple. I played Lord Murugan. Just before the shot, the director insisted that I shave my head to play the role of the deity. My mother wasn't willing. 'My child has to go to school', she cried. There were long discussions. Eventually, Sowcar Janaki intervened and suggested I wear a wig. The wig felt funny on the head. Nevertheless, I thoroughly enjoyed myself in the film atmosphere.

'After that I only half-heartedly continued with schooling. In the studios I worked tirelessly. As a child star, I've worked in more than 200 films. *Anuraagalao* (the Tamil version of *Anuraag*) was one such film. On the first day of the shooting, the producer told my mother that I was to play the heroine (Moushumi's) role. Initially, we thought it was a joke, but when the dressman brought the saree and blouse,

we knew it was for real. Dasari Narayan Rao launched me as a full-fledged leading lady. Unfortunately, the film flopped. Then Raghavendra Rao signed me for two films. Both were super hits and I had finally arrived.

'On the Hindi film scene, I did *Solva Sawan* years ago which didn't fare well. Last year *Himmatwala* clicked, and here I am. Today, I'm doing about 18 films here and maybe three down South. I don't miss Madras while I'm in Bombay, probably because I'm so busy. But I feel the need to immediately buy a house. It isn't comfortable to stay 20 days in a hotel, month after month. I have my family with me so I don't feel lonely. Except for them, I don't have any friends here. Well, maybe Rekha. I often write letters to her from Madras or when I'm out on location shooting. We have lots of fun when we are together, though I don't feel the need to share secrets with anybody. Actually, I have no secrets. I tell my mother everything I do during the day. I think I'm a good daughter. Or, at least, I try to be one. I've never defied my parents. When I'm very angry I turn violent, but otherwise I'm quite a cool person. I seldom sulk, and normally don't cry. I cannot remember when and for what reason I cried last.

'I'm very stubborn. If I've had a fight with someone, I won't make the first move towards making up, even if the person happens to be my younger sister. I wait for her to come up and say sorry. Once that's done, I completely forget the episode. But till truce is announced, I remain unapproachable. During work, I don't like fights and tensions. Jaya Prada and I initially did not get along. However, when we realised that the press was thriving on our cold war, we decided to make up. Strangely, the fights never affected our work. If you see *Tohfa* or *Maqsad* you will never sense the hostility. Thank God, we are on talking terms now, no more of those pointless controversies.

'My mother was very upset when she saw the *Kaamyab* posters (She's not Sridevi. She's Radha') promoting Radha. Her point was, 'Let them say Radha is the greatest, if they wish, but why drag your name into it?' My mother is my greatest critic. My father is my kindest viewer. I'm paranoid about holding a film screening for the family. I'm so nervous I can't breathe. After so many years, I'm still to learn to take my family's disapproval sportingly. I brood over it for days. I

feel very happy when everybody calls me the Number One star. As an actress, however, I'm not satisfied. I want to do different roles. I want to do comedy, offbeat roles for small banners. I want to act in all kinds of films, only then will I feel fulfilled. But I don't ever wish to give up *masala* films, because I enjoy singing and dancing.'

At 7 p.m. Sri begins her second shift. She does not return to the make-up room until the last shot of the day, five hours later. Well after midnight, at 12.30, when the director finally announces 'pack-up', Sridevi rushes to her room, throws off her jewellery, *chappals* and costume, hurriedly removes her make-up, and changes. Her hairdresser tries to brush the knots out of her hair, but Sridevi has no patience. She waves her aside and coils her knotted tresses into a high bun. Her paraphernalia has already been loaded in the car. The director waits outside, to bid her a courteous goodbye.

Sridevi gets into her car and kicks off her sandals. She is dying to sleep, but her bed is still a 20-minute drive away. On the way back, she looks out of the car window at the moonlit night... then reviews her day, methodically ticking off the tasks accomplished. Perhaps this is the only time she gets for introspection. At the hotel, she stops by at the reception to leave instructions, to not put through any calls to her room, until morning. Room 1844 is no longer in shambles. Aunty has cleared up all the mess, packed all the suitcases. Her mother has gone to sleep. Aunty and Lata are almost asleep. Sridevi's fresh nightie, skin lotion, and vitamin tablets are all laid out beside her bed. After a quick shower, she gets into her nightie, downs her vitamins with a tall glass of milk, then jumps into bed. For a few seconds she stares at the empty walls, but when Aunty switches off the lights, she rolls over, snuggles into her blanket...

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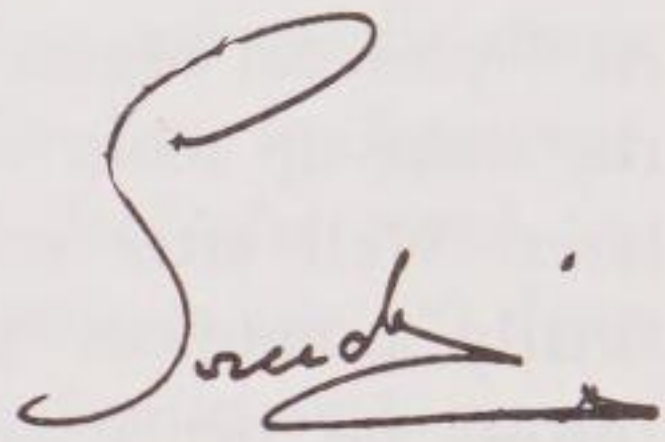
'I feel both surprised and proud that I have been able to survive in this industry for so many years. In '82, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to cope with the growing influences. Bombay was a new city and a career in Hindi films called for too many adjustments. Looking back, things have worked out well. I couldn't understand Hindi then, today I do. I speak the language fluently and have made friends with the

city. I don't live in a hotel anymore. I have a home of my own, eat *ghar ka khana*. As a person too, I've matured. I feel stronger. I'm calmer because I'm not working. The madness of racing to the studios is over. There is one more difference. Today, I go for shopping to public places without feeling frightened.'



(Sridevi)

1985

JAYA PRADA

In a curtain drawn, dark room, Jaya lies in her bed, lazily listening to the drone of the passing aeroplane overhead. It's a sound she is yet to get used to. She is yet to get used to the Bombay film parties too. After attending so many of them, she still feels uncomfortable at a party. Last night at Pradeep Sharma's launch party for his new film, she could not even pretend that she was enjoying herself. At the other end of the house she can hear Babu, her servant boy, working in the kitchen. A few minutes later, he brings Jaya her morning coffee in a steel tumbler. Sitting cross-legged on her bed, she starts sipping her coffee, leisurely. Jaya likes taking as much time over it as possible. That's when she thinks about the day ahead... But not today.

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Today, she has a splitting headache and is feeling feverish. In fact, she wonders if she should cancel her Urdu lessons, but at 9.20 a.m. when the doorbell rings and her master*ji* arrives, she grabs her notebook and uncomplainingly settles down for her lessons. She's been taking Urdu lessons for over a month now. 'I've learnt the alphabets, but I'm more keen on improving my diction. I'm very good at picking up languages. My family calls me a parrot. Even down South, I didn't have problems with the other three languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada). I'm still not satisfied with my Hindi. That is why these days I make it a point to communicate with everyone around me only in Hindi.' An hour of Urdu lessons puts Jaya in a better mood, but her headache persists. She remembers she has to ring up wig-maker, Victor to bring her wigs. Her hairdresser Kamala sees Jaya talking on the phone and bursts out laughing. 'Only two seconds ago I entered your room and you seemed fast asleep, but now suddenly you are talking on the phone...' Her staff is used to her moods. They've been with her since the beginning of her career. Her make-up man Venkatesh tells me that when Jaya sits for her make-up, she is either extremely fidgety, or she shuts her eyes and sits like a statue! 'It is very easy to do her face, because she has a fabulous complexion. 'Jaya blushes at the compliment and adds she has never had a pimple all her life.

Do you sometimes wish you were a couple of inches taller? You could have carried off Western clothes so much better? I

ask her. 'No...I'm happy the way I am.' Some people say you revel in being short because you idolise Jaya Bachchan. 'This is ridiculous. They say I have imitated Jaya*ji* in *Sharaabi*. Why should I? I have my own style of acting.' Outside, the living room is buzzing with activity. It is past noon, and the cloudy morning has changed into a sunny afternoon. Raju, Jaya's spot-boy is serving tea to everyone. An elderly gentleman in a red and black chequered *lungi* is sitting on a sofa reading the morning paper. I'm told he is Jaya's uncle. The busiest of all is Ramesh (Sharma), Jaya's secretary. He is discussing dates with a producer on the phone. When he is not discussing dates, he talks about his film *Ghutan*, which is not only produced but also written and directed by him. Ramesh discusses Jaya Prada, calls her a funny girl. 'Somebody is ready to give her 50,000 for a one-minute appearance on stage, but she is just not interested.'

There is a large calendar of Lord Siddhivinayak on the wall. There is another small photograph of the Lord in Jaya's make-up tray as well. She is a staunch devotee of Lord Ganesh. Barring this, the room has no personal touch. In fact, it doesn't even look lived-in. Her two servant boys live here while Jaya scuttles between Bombay and Bangalore. The house is yet to be done up. Jaya isn't embarrassed by the disorganised atmosphere. 'I consider myself fortunate to have a home and a phone in Bombay. Even though this place is yet to be done up, it is still more comfortable than living in a hotel. While living in hotels, I used to miss home-cooked food. I'm not very fussy about what I eat as long as I'm served quickly. Last year, I was so tired of eating chicken and meat every day, that I turned vegetarian. When there are so many leafy vegetables, why must I eat meat? But, of course I eat eggs. You can call me an eggitarian,' she laughs. 'When I gave up eating meat, everyone told me, I'd miss it. But I don't...'

A strong aroma of South Indian food fills the room. It's nearing lunchtime. But Jaya isn't eating today. 'After last night's party, I don't think the shooting will commence before 3 p.m. I've to catch the evening flight to Madras. I hope they remember this.' The star and the secretary are formal, yet comfortable. She calls him Ramesh*ji*. Ramesh knows what calls to pass on to madam. He's familiar with the people she approves and disapproves.

At 3 p.m. dress designer Sulakshana arrives with a large packet of clothes. She is surprised to see that Jaya has not left for shooting. 'You mean they haven't called you as yet...?' she asks in disbelief. She shows Jaya the saree the director has asked her to wear for the scene. Jaya nods in approval. The two woman discuss some more clothes and after that, out of the blue, they begin discussing school and college admission hassles. Jaya discusses her four-year-old nephew Siddharth.'He is only a little boy but he carries a heavy satchel every day. I helped him to cover all the books the other day, and believe me, I really felt sorry for the poor boy. During our times, education was different. I went to a Telugu school because there was no English medium school in Rajamundhry. I was a very conscientious student and always stood first in my class. But I was a very foolish child. Every time we got our report card, I invariably returned home crying. To my innocent mind, my rank seemed the lowest. I used to think that the higher the number, the better I had fared. It took quite some time for my brother to make me understand that number one meant being the best...It meant being ahead of all others.'

'Don't you want to be number one in films too?' My question startles her. She thinks for a moment, then replies. 'If I have to reach the position, I will. There are more than 100 films made in India every year. But I can't do every single film, can I? So, I choose the ones I think offer me the best. Sometimes I make wrong choices. When it's wrong, the film flops...I think hits are a matter of luck!'

The last few years have brought about tremendous changes in the actress. She has not only become more articulate and confident, but has also developed a sense of humour. Why does she have this reputation of being unapproachable? 'In the beginning I was very cautious. I was not used to the Bombay scene. Basically, I'm shy and take time to open up with strangers. These days I am getting comfortable. When I started acting, I was only 15 years old. My father was a film distributor so the family was not surprised when one day I was placed before the camera. My first film was in Telugu called *Bhumilosam*. It never occurred to me to ask my father why he chose to put me in films and my sister into domesticity. I believed that every film I signed, would be the last. So, in-between films, I continued with my studies,

Bharata Natyam, Carnatic music and *sitar*. Unfortunately, I could not do justice to either because I signed more and more films. There is so much that goes on within an actress before the word 'action' and after the word 'cut'... It would be nice to use these experiences in my future performances. When a new film is released, I wait anxiously to see if my family has noticed those little things I'm proud of... It's a pity that we artistes can never be friends with one another. No matter how much we pretend, the feeling of rivalry is always there. We are all the time worried about protecting our egos, our images. Personally, I'm not the kind to trust easily. I can be very happy or very sad but I don't disclose this even to my closest associate. I have no friends, no confidant.'

At 4 p.m. the telephone rings. And it's time for Jaya to leave for shooting. 'Has Jeetu*ji* arrived?' Ramesh asks the caller. He has. At once, Jaya walks to the photograph of Siddhivinayak, says a silent prayer and gets ready to leave. In the car, she tells me she is superstitious about prayers. 'If something goes wrong during the day, I feel it's because I forgot to say my prayers.' As we are passing Juhu, Jaya looks out of the window and inquires if we are in Bandra? 'This is Juhu,' the driver informs. I ask her what would she do if she ever got lost in Bombay. 'I dread to think of such a situation... My road sense is very bad.' At Nanavati Bungalow, there is rush of feet as men and women scramble towards her. Some, to ask for autographs, others because they have an appointment. Jaya is meticulous about her appointments. While her hairdresser brushes her hair, and the dress-man helps her choose matching bangles, Jaya completes an interview she had started with a journalist yesterday. When she's through, she changes into her costume, and before the director can call her, takes time off for a quick photo session with a freelance photographer. The director is aware that she is short of time and so rushes through her shots. They are shooting an emotional scene between Jeetu and Jaya. As usual the two are playing husband and wife. In between shots, Jaya sits on the *jhoola* in the outer room scrutinising the crowd. There is no hint of fascination in her eyes when a man brings his three-year-old child and introduces the kid as her fan. 'Why can't the man simply say he is my fan rather than drag an innocent child into all this?' she says angrily.

As the hour passes, I can see Jaya becoming more agitated. But once her last shot is okayed and she is on her way to the airport she is suddenly relaxed. At the airport, I ask her what she is thinking about at that particular moment. 'I'm hoping that there is no bomb on my flight... I'm hoping that the flight is on time, so that I can reach home early, get some sleep and report for tomorrow's shooting on time.' You've been shooting for the last so many years. What do you intend doing with all the money? In answer Jaya rolls her eyes, 'Money? What money? Don't you know these days nobody gives you money?' We say goodbye. A few hours later, after the security check and probably a bumpy flight, Jaya will reach her home city, Bangalore. Another car, with another well-trained chauffeur, will come to fetch her. He will drive her to her luxurious bungalow. She will tell tales of her shooting to her family...They will enquire about her new release *Zabardast*. Her nephew will ask her to cover some more books for him. She will do so, willingly. Then, when she's tired, she will eat her vegetarian dinner and go to sleep. But not before she has set the alarm... for the next day's shooting.

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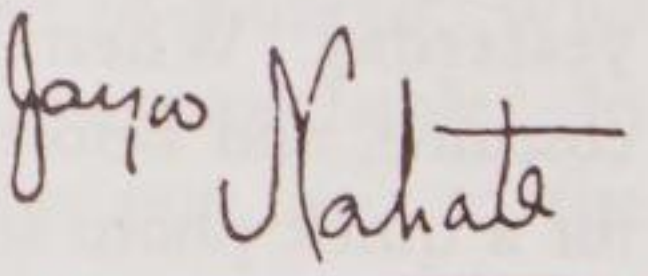
❛I sound so innocent. My stint with politics has turned me stronger and wiser. I'm more capable of dealing with problems today than I was earlier. Earlier, I used to cry often. I hated being away from home. Today, if I'm not visiting Bombay for a long period, I miss the city and the film world.❜



(Jaya Prada)

1985

DEV ANAND

His desk is in disarrary. There are huge piles of books, registers, files and papers scattered everywhere. Very unlike the meticulous gentleman Dev Anand is known to be. 'I'm no administrator to organise all this,' he snaps defensively. 'I'm an artiste and clearing drawers and tables is a waste of my creative energy and time.'

*The clock in the Navketan office seems to be on a double march. 'That's because it's scared that Dev*saab *might one day overtake,'joke his staffers. He has been on the go for more than three decades now...*

Literally racing through his career. His tryst with the camera started at a time when the movie camera was still subjected to experiments. And it's going on...Except for '81 and '83 which, according to Dev, are his 'leap years,' he has been making films, year after year, each time with a new breed of stars. Not once in these years has his enthusiasm flagged... His eyes seem to be forever fixed on the moment... On today... On what tomorrow has to offer... When I meet him for this interview, his first reaction is, 'Why talk of the past when the present is so beautiful?' He is both hesitant and embarrassed to go down memory lane. But once he resolves, moments flow easily. Sometimes impatient, sometimes preoccupied, but always cheerful, Dev Anand goes back in time... Tracing the threads of his life and career...

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1943; Gurdaspur: Dev Anand is 18 and has graduated with honours in English Literature from Government College, Lahore. He wants to go to England for higher studies, but his family cannot afford it. This doesn't dampen his spirits. 'Though financially poor, I'm emotionally rich,' he writes in his diary. 'I'm alone, but not lonely. My spirit is free and I'm in love with my spirit...'

Dev's father, Pishori Mal is a lawyer and a freedom fighter. During his free time he loves to learn languages and can speak Sanskrit, Hebrew and Arabic besides English and Hindi. His all time favourite book is the Bible. 'If you want to learn English, read the Bible,' he tells his children. Dev knows the Biblical prayers. Dev's mother suffers from a throat infection and is advised by the doctor to drink goat's

milk first thing in the morning. So at 6.30 every morning, Dev goes out to purchase the milk. He travels by the Express bus to Amritsar to get her medicine. One day when he returns, his tired mother watches him soulfully and says, 'I'm troubling you too much, ain't I? But I'll leave you a wealth of my blessings... Even when I'm no more, I'll watch you from heaven and help you in your moments of pain.' His mother dies a few weeks later. Home is never the same for Dev. 'My mother was what most mothers are — caring and attentive. We spoke little to each other but there was a deep bond between us.'

For a while Dev is left playing nanny to his younger siblings. It's a trying phase for Dev, who spends most of his time at home. Once in a while, when his friends force him, and when he has the money, he watches film. When he has more money, he buys old issues of Baburao Patel's 'Film India' from the raddiwala. It fascinates him the way this powerful journalist cuts down leading stars to size. One day Ashok Kumar comes to Lahore for the silver jubilee function of Bandhan where Dev is studying at the Government college. Ashok Kumar is a superstar those days, and is mobbed by fans. In a distant corner is Dev Anand, watching the tamasha. Suddenly an idea flashes across. 'If can't go abroad, if I can't do my M.A...' he tells himself, 'then I will become a film actor!' A few weeks later Dev packs his bags and leaves Gurdaspur.

'I'm in search of a dream...' He writes in his diary. 'I have only 30 rupees in my pocket, but I'm not afraid, I trust my spirit...!'

1945: Bombay is both fascinating and frightening. People and vehicles rush past... Everyone is running a race. Nevertheless, 41, Pali Hill, where Chetan Anand lives, is quiet and peaceful. The small building is surrounded by trees. Earlier, a teacher at the Doon School, Chetan left Dehra Dun to come to Bombay in search of a career in films. He stayed at 41, Pali Hill and Dev stayed with him. Once Dev is doing a small role in a play directed by Balraj Sahni. During the rehearsal Dev muffs his dialogue. An angry Balraj swears at him: 'You will never make it as an actor.' Surprisingly, the senior actor's statement does not depress the aspirant.

'I'll make it and I'll be remembered as an evergreen star,' he writes in his diary, this time in red ink.

August: Dev has a steady job in the postal department and earns Rs. 165 a month. In the evening he goes for coffee to 'Parisian Dairy', (the present 'Jazz By The Bay') a favourite haunt of strugglers, trying to make it in films. Hopeful actors, directors, cinematographers gather here day after day and discuss the great roles they'd like to play... great films they'd like to make. Sometimes, other star hopefuls like Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor come there. It is here that roles are discussed and chances offered to deserving actors. Every evening, some actor's fate blossoms after a chance meeting with a director. One day, sipping his cup of tea, Dev discovers that producer Baburao Pai of Prabhat is on the lookout for a new face to play the lead in a new film, *Hum Ek Hain*. The very next day, Dev goes to meet Pai at his office. It is 11 a.m. and the place is deserted. The watchman informs Dev that '*Saab* is not in'. Dev perches himself on the parapet outside the gate. A few minutes later, when Pai arrives, he is surprised to see a young man waiting for him on the parapet. 'I'm Dev Anand,' he tells Pai. 'I wish to play the lead in your film.' There is a brief silence while the director stares at the youth. A month later Dev gets a call from Prabhat. He has to rush to Pune for a screen-test. Out of the 55 actors screen-tested, Dev is the chosen one. The company signs him on an exclusive contract for five years at Rs. 500 a month.

'I will remember this day for years...' Dev writes in his dairy. 'I will remember the lump in my throat and the tears that filled my eyes.'

November; Prabhat Studio, Pune: A mistake on the part of a *dhobi* leads to an enduring relationship. Instead of his favourite chequered shirt, the *dhobi* delivers a spotless white *kurta* at Dev's. Later in the day, Dev discover a shy, young Mangalorean, who's Vishram Bedekar's assistant-cum-dance director, wearing his shirt. The young man Guru Dutt, and Dev become friends. Those are hard days of struggle. But the two have the guts to rough it out, and the burning ambition to make it big one day. They boost each other's morale by promising that whoever gets the first break will give break to the other.

1947; August 14: Dev is dining with a few friends at the Ritz Hotel. Suddenly, crackers and balloons explode. On the roads people are dancing, singing, throwing gulal and garlands at each other. Jawaharlal Nehru's voice is echoed everywhere... India has attained freedom. To celebrate the moment, Dev orders beer for everybody. Suddenly everyone is in high spirits, and they all begin to sing patriotic songs. They leave the restaurant around 1 a.m. and hop into the last train from Churchgate. Shahid Latif is in the same train. Together, they sit by the window and sings songs dedicated to the country. By the time the train reaches Bandra, Shahid Latif is very impressed with Dev's effervescence, and offers him the lead role in his next film *Ziddi*. Meanwhile, Dev gets an offer from Ashok Kumar to do a film for Bombay Talkies.

1948: Mohan Sinha has signed Dev and Suraiya for his film *Vidya*. On the first day of shooting, the director introduces Dev to Suraiya. For a while they're both silent, then fidgeting with the edge of her dupatta, Suraiya shyly says, 'I've been keen on meeting you for a long time... You resemble my favourite actor Gregory Peck.' It's a formal meeting. Neither could have guessed that in months to come their relationship would blossom into a romance which provides a lot of grist to the gossip mill, for along time to come. Their romance is scented with mogras sent through the unit boy, and long walks at midnight along Marine Drive.

'I am innocent and shy... she's famous and successful,' writes Dev in his diary. 'Our relationship is an attraction of the opposites.'

1950: Chetan Anand who had won an award in 1946 in Cannes for his film *Neecha Nagar* wants to make another film, but no producer is ready to give him a chance. Eventually, to launch Chetan, Dev floats a company — Navketan — Nav because it's new and Ketan, after Chetan's son. Even though, it is a beautiful subject based on Gigol's Inspector General, the film *Afsar*, flops at the box- office. The failure of the film puts Chetan in deep despair. He resolves never to make another film.

1951: Dev Anand launches *Baazi*, based on Gigol's *Inspector General*, to give a break to his friend, Guru Dutt. *Baazi* is a

hit and establishes Dev Anand as an actor, Guru Dutt as a director, S.D. Burman as a music director, Sahir Ludhianvi as a writer and Geeta Bali as an actress. *Baazi* sets a trend in thriller films. Guru Dutt gets rave reviews but no film offers. Like Chetan Anand, he too becomes melancholic. 'I'll never make another film,' he says.

1952: Dev cannot bear to see Chetan and Guru Dutt suffer. Time and again he cheers them up, but they refuse to get out of the blues. Finally, to get them out of this morbid spell, he organises his next production — *Andhiyaan* to be directed by Chetan Anand and manipulates Film Arts' *Jaal* for Guru Dutt. *Jaal* is a hit, whilst *Andhiyaan* is a big flop. This time Guru Dutt is suddenly flooded with offers and Chetan Anand gets deeper into depression.

'It is sad to see my brother suffer thus...' writes Dev. 'Chetan is the brightest, the most intelligent and the most talented of us brothers. All he needs is one hit and there will be no stopping Chetan.'

1954: It's eight months and Navketan has not paid its staff. The bombing of *Andhiyaan* and earlier *Afsar* (both directed by Chetan Anand) has put a lot of pressure on the Anand brothers. It's during this phase that one day Vijay Anand comes to the office and narrates his script idea to Chetan and Dev. The idea appeals to Chetan. They decide it could be made into a quickie, shot mostly on the streets of Bombay with one prop - a taxi. The entire film is shot with a small camera and in exactly 35 shooting days. The film *Taxi Driver* is a superhit. Navketan's first major hit. Three crucial decisions follow the release of *Taxi Driver*. One, Chetan Anand leaves Navketan. Two, Vijay Anand decides that films is what he wants to do and most important, Dev and the heroine of his first super hit, Mona decide to get married.

1957: Vijay Anand has written his second script, *Nau Do Gyarah*, and is keen to direct the film himself. When Dev hears about this, he tells Vijay not to be childish. 'Direction requires a very mature person and you haven't even finished your studies yet,' Dev scolds Vijay but he is persistent. 'If I am not allowed to direct the film, I'll not give you the script,' he retorts. Then, one morning when Dev, Mona and Vijay are driving to Mahableshwar, Vijay carries his script with him. During the drive, to spite Dev, Vijay begins

reading his script aloud to Mona. At first Dev gets irritated, but slowly his interest is aroused... As they cross Thane, Vijay chuckles and impishly asks, 'The deal is on?' 'Of course, it is,' Dev grins. As soon as they reach Mahableshwar, Dev phones his office — 'Production No. 3 will start before Production No. 2 and Goldie will direct it.'

Nau Do Gyarah, is a hit and it establishes Goldie as a promising director and a good craftsman. He follows it up with *Kala Bazaar*, another hit. Dev makes *Kala Pani* with director, Raj Khosla who has been Guru Dutt's assistant. The film, a highly successful one, brings Dev his first 'Filmfare' award for acting.

1962: *Hum Dono* is representing India at the Berlin festival. Dev is present for the screening and is fascinated with the attention he receives. Never before has Dev met such a group of talented strongly motivated directors, actors, writers all at the same time. Pearl Buck is one amongst the jury. Pearl has for a long time been keen on an Indian film and wonders if Dev would like to be in the project. The subject she has in mind is Balchander Raja's *Too Long In The West*. But Dev isn't moved by the book. 'I'm just making it in my country and if I do a film it should be something to be proud of.' He recommends R.K.Narayan's *Guide*. And *Guide* it is.

1963: A quickie, *Tere Ghar Ke Samne*, one more film directed by Vijay Anand is launched.

1965-66: Immmediately Dev works to get the filming rights of *Guide*. The cast is finalised and Mehboob Studio is booked for six weeks. Three weeks prior to the shooting, Chetan Anand, the director drops a bombshell: He cannot shoot *Guide* because the long due permission from the government to shoot *Haqeeqat* on the NEFA (North East Frontier Area) border has come through and he wants to shoot this film before winter sets in. Overnight, Dev Anand is stranded without a director. He contacts Raj Khosla. Raj Khosla agrees but backs out a few days later because he cannot cope with the Navketan pace of working. A week before the shooting, a harassed Dev turns to Vijay Anand in desperation. 'Goldie, you are the man for the moment... You'll direct *Guide*.' Goldie accepts the challenge. The film is shot in two languages. English and Hindi, both shot

independently. It is an expensive project but is worth the effort... The Hindi version is nominated for the Oscar.

1970: Dev is in Nepal to attend the crown prince's wedding. Outside a small cafe, Dev spots a group of youngsters smoking hash... They look like they are in a trance. Dev walks towards the group and observes them closely. Amongst them is Jasbir, the character Zeenat Aman eventually plays in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*. *Prem Pujari*, is a miserable flop. It was planned to reflect on the Indo-Chinese aggression, to soothe people, but the result, unfortunately, proves otherwise: The film opens amidst riots in the North. When the news reaches the Navketan office, everyone is upset. Except, Dev Anand. He is too involved with his next film to mourn the loss of his last project. 'For me when a film is over, it is over. I'm neither elevated by its success nor depressed by its failure.'

1971-73: *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* is released and is a super hit and so is Zeenat Aman. But the audience finds Zeenat too westernized to accept her in the traditional heroines' roles and the only roles Zeenat is offered is of a vamp. It is a depressing situation. Eventually, to solve the problem Dev launches a special film for Zeenat, *Heera Panna*. The attempt is fruitful. After *Heera Panna*, Zeenat is flooded with offers from successful film-makers like Nasir Hussain, Manoj Kumar and B.R. Chopra.

1974: Dev had met the King of Bhutan at his coronation ceremony during the shooting of *Jewel Thief*, in Sikkim. His meeting with the King of Nepal is equally dramatic. 'One day I'll make a film here and capture its beauty on celluloid...' The film is *Ishq Ishq Ishq*. Innumerable directors before Dev, including John Houston, have tried to shoot in the mountains but have returned dissatisfied because it wasn't practical. But Dev in his obsession makes the impossible, possible. All the time a helicopter waits in the vicinity in case somebody is sick and has to be flown to Pokhara. And this happens everyday. Except Dev Anand, who is never unwell. He goes for long walks in the hills.

'My spirit is here and I'm happiest working in these hills,' he writes in his diary. His only disappointment is that the person for whom he made *Ishq Ishq Ishq* never gets to see it.

The King of Bhutan dies suddenly. 'I feel I have cheated the king of a promise,' says Dev.

1975: *Ishq Ishq Ishq* has put Navketan in a financial soup and even Dev Anand, who never admits to depression, seems tense these days. It's a bad phase. Two productions are announced simultaneously. *Bullet*, to be directed by Vijay Anand, and *Jaan-e-man* to be directed by Chetan Anand. 'It feels as if I'm in a terrible mess, but it does not seem the end of the road,' Dev writes in his diary.

1977: Emergency. Dev wants to make *Des Pardes* but the government does not allow him to shoot in London. Information and Broadcasting Minister V.C. Shukla has issued orders that all artistes must compulsorily render their services to Bombay Doordarshan for variety programmes. Dev disagrees. According to him, it's a foolish decision which could destroy the aura of stars. In protest, he launches a new party, National Party. A lot of cine artistes like Shatrughan Sinha and Hema Malini support him. For a while it seems as if Dev is enjoying the role of a politician but eight months later, the Emergency is lifted and things become normal again.

Dev launches *Des Pardes* with Tina Munim. It's a film Dev Anand has enjoyed shooting the most. He writes in his diary, 'I have wanted to make this film for 17 years and every time I'd begin picking the script, I'd find some jinx stalling it.' So, finally when *Des Pardes* is released Dev Anand is proud of not just the film but also his discovery, Tina Munim.

1982: *Swami Dada* is in the making. It is the story of a Godman spreading the philosophy of peace to mankind. One of the roles in the story calls for a foreign actress. For the right girl Dev flies to U.S.A, interviews numerous girls and screen-tests them. By the end of his stay, Dev has liked six girls and has yet to make the choice. They are all good-looking, with photogenic faces, which makes it difficult for him to make up his mind. On the last day, when Dev is leaving for India, he throws a grand party inviting all the girls to his apartment. 'The announcement will take place at the party,' he tells them. It's a party nobody enjoys because everyone is tense. Finally, when it's time for the announcement Dev moves to a dark corner while the

compere walks to the dias and calls the winner's name... 'Christine O' Neil,' he says and suddenly the room resounds with claps... Christine walks to the corner to hug Dev, tears trickling down her cheeks...

1984: These days Suneil is never at home and Dev wonders if all is well with his 20-year-old son. Since he is too embarrassed to keep tabs on him, he mentions in passing to his wife if all is well with Suneil. 'Oh yes,' says Mona confidently. 'Our son has taken after you. He wants to be an actor and has joined Asha Chandra's Acting Academy.' The revelation startles Dev. Quickly a film is planned with Suneil and him, *Anand Aur Anand*. All through the shooting Dev consciously keeps a low profile. He wants his son to hog the limelight and does all he can to project Suneil the right way. He wants the film to succeed and works hard for it. But the film flops. For the first time, Dev Anand is deeply wounded. Says a family friend, 'Dev was very upset when he first heard the news. He was sensitive to the failure of his son's first film.' 'I'm used to flops so I'll bear it, but my son is not used to failure. The film should have been a _hit at least for Suneil's sake,' he writes in his diary.

1985: He is making *Hum Naujawan* with newcomers Richa Sharma, Bunty and Atlee Brar. During shooting, he is their mentor but after pack-up, he is their friend. 'Why should I call Dev, Dev *saab*?' asks a startled Richa. 'Dev is my friend.' 'Of course, I'm their friend,' agrees Dev, who does not direct his actors but simply guides them to emote before the camera. 'I like to pamper my actors because after all they pamper me too. Who cares if none of my performances get me awards, I've given a break to so many actors and their success is worth a million awards to me. I feel it is selfish to work on one's own performances all the time. I've worked for my actors' future. I've made my contribution to the film industry, even though it has not been acknowledged. When I'm no more on the scene, people will watch my films and remember me. They'll miss me when they see my songs. After all in our country, real artistes are discovered only after their death. While Guru Dutt made flops, we called him a fool. Today, Guru Dutt has become history.

'I feel hurt when people say Dev Anand's films don't run. I know this is true, nevertheless it hurts. I feel you've got to be made of steel to go on and on and on... It requires both

courage and perseverence. Today, in spite of my flops and what people might say I can proudly claim that I have an original camera sense... I'm hardworking... And survive on people's goodwill. Maybe I'd make better films if I plan and go about it in the right way. We planned *Anand Aur Anand*, took a successful team, an emotional subject and saleable stars. It still backfired, didn't it?

'It's all destiny, whether a film is a hit or a flop. I'm not embarrassed by my films, even when they are flops. What is important is to enjoy what you are doing. And I enjoy working the way I do. I can't make myself function the way other film-makers do. I can't sit at the table and work on the budget for weeks. I make my films like this... At the snap of my fingers. If I had to work with somebody who had to re-shoot every sequence, I'd probably die of boredom.'

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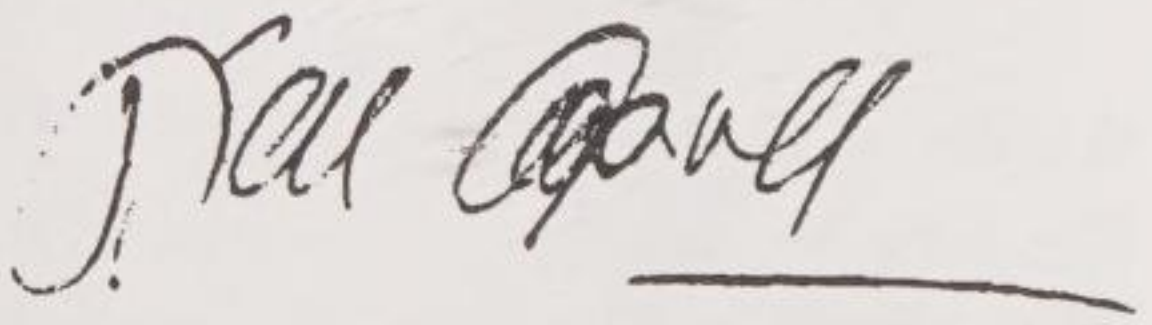
'I don't believe in flashbacks. Why look back when the present is so beautiful. It's the critics who analyse my films. For me, what's over is over. Only those who are not creative talk of boredom. I'm never bored. Sometimes, my friends ask me, 'You've made so many films. How much money have you lost?' I tell them, 'Nothing, I've lost nothing and gained everything.'



(Dev Anand)

1985

SHABANA AZMI

She's been called everything. The most talented actress on the Indian screen. The darling of the media. Friendly and helpful. Shrewd and competitive. Warm and understanding. Cold and selfish. A temperamental, highly strung virago. A kind and gentle woman. When you've been in this business for over a decade, the acclaim comes and goes. The press loves you, it loves you not, it loves you... Your rivals spread stories about you. When your supporters take up for you, it is said that you manipulated them. Shabana Azmi has lived in this glass house long enough to know that nothing here lasts forever. Except, perhaps for talent. And with four National Awards behind her - three of them won consecutively — her talent is no longer seriously in question. The intensity that Shabana brings to her roles, the depth of understanding, is something that no other actress can manage.

Moreover, she is among the very few Indian actresses who understands cinema. Not in a pseudo-intellectual fashion, but in a pragmatic manner. Talk to her about camera technique and she will tell you why Paar *scored over* Damul. *Discuss characterisation, and she will explain how she paraphrases whole existence into the three hours of a Hindi film. Why there is a lobby against her, dubbing her a straightforward manipulator? Her romantic liaisons have been blown up out of all proportion, and even her marriage has been the subject of vicious speculation.*

Part of the answer lies in Shabana's personality. She is warm, she is friendly. But her warmth goes on and off, depending on her moods, and she can be needlessly cold. This is often mistaken for arrogance. However, those who have known Shabana know that whatever else she is, she is upfront. Despite all odds, Shabana has stayed, survived and shone. With every year, she has become a better actress and a better person. Nevertheless continuing to create controversy. In this interview, Shabana Azmi discusses her secret marriage, her brother's controversial wedding... The false impression that she has let down her feminist fans... And her recent statement about wanting to quit films...

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Your brother Baba's marriage, like your own marriage six

months ago, is shrouded in mystery. Reportedly, the Kher household is very upset because your sister-in-law Tanvi has been forcibly turned into a Muslim. Is this true?

Ours was not a secret marriage. It was on-the-spur-of-the-moment decision which took even the two of us — Javed and me — by surprise. Just two days before the wedding, Javed and I had mutually decided that we did not need the formality of a marriage. And yet, we got married. Of course, I will never stop regretting that *Abba* was not with us that time. He was holidaying in Azamgarh, but he sent me a letter along with a beautiful poem — perhaps the most beautiful poem a father could write for his daughter. It will remain my most cherished possession. Tanvi has not been converted to Islam. Anyone who knows the Azmi household, even vaguely, would laugh at the very idea. We are a very secular family. True, the Khers had certain reservations about Baba being a Muslim, which is only natural, but in time to come they will realise that Baba and Tanvi are happy together and, ultimately, that is what is important.

What do you feel about your new role of domesticity?
To be honest, I haven't yet donned the mantle of domesticity. I guess I'll do so only when we shift into our new house later in the year.

Has marriage changed your relationship with your parents, friends, colleagues and the press?
I think my parents are adjusting very well to their new role. All along, my mother had been pampering her two overgrown children. Suddenly, in a matter of months, the atmosphere at home has changed. I can see my mother consciously assigning more responsibility to both Baba and me. In a way it is good. She has so much talent, she should really be utilising her time doing better things than running three homes. The amount of time I can spend with my friends has been considerably reduced. But then, that happens in the case of every girl who is newly married. However, the depth of emotions and involvement is the same. With my colleagues, I have always been a professional. The day after my marriage, I recorded a song for Muzaffar Ali's *Anjuman*, dubbed for Vinod Chopra, and shot for Subhash Sharma. They were commitments I had made long ago and I did not want to let them down. As for the press, I must say in all honesty, that most of my interviews have

been quite accurately reproduced. It is only in articles where I haven't been consulted or quoted, that a strong streak of prejudice can be seen, for or against. Recently, I was appalled by an article which said that I was jealous of Naseer and hated him. This, soon after I'd come back from a 40-day shooting schedule with him in Assam, where all of us had a ball, was shocking. I had never been as angry as when they categorically put down that I'd arrived roaring drunk to his house and passed out on the steps. Now, this kind of thing can be very, very damaging. Film magazines are taken very seriously by small-town people, and I was hopping mad. But two days later all my anger evaporated and I did nothing about it. I am talking of this incident now because I want to squash this disgusting rumour before it overtakes the Smita-Shabana one.

How does it feel to win four National Awards in a span of 11 years?

Recognition is a very gratifying thing, but I'm certainly not feeling smug. I do not think that my entire body of work has been great. I've had my share of the good and the bad (performance). On one hand, I shudder to think of some performances I've given, while on the other, I'm disappointed about some of the roles that went by unnoticed. But I have finally reached a stage where a film is more important to me than just a chance to prove my histrionic worth. Today, I will be quite happy to be in a film that offers new insights whether psychological, emotional, political or social, even if I have a miniscule role in it. I'm no longer hung up on the length of my roles.

But didn't you in a recent interview to a magazine say you were quitting films?

That's not what I've said and you will agree with me if you read the article carefully. It's the headline which is misleading and I've been hounded by queries ever since the magazine hit the stands. I'm not quitting films. But I am cutting down on the number of films I sign.

Why?

It isn't possible to give of one's best if one is not feeling strongly. In the past I've wanted commercial success and artistic recognition. I must say I got more than a fair share of both. Now I am at a point where I am financially secure. I don't have to grab a role that offers me pots of money.

There is no role I covet for recognition. If I wanted, it would be quite simple for me to put together a film around a character I am dying to play. I have enough directors for friends, a writer for a husband plus the finance to back such a product.

Then what is preventing you from doing so?
I feel I deserve a break. I want a long holiday to do nothing. My entire mechanism is on strike, not because I am nursing a grievance and waiting for a demand to be met, but because the machine has run out of oil and wants time for refuelling.

In other words you're feeling listless and uninspired?
Perhaps...

But you still have plenty of films on hand. Does that mean you'll be doing them mechanically?
I am incapable of doing my work mechanically and that is why I am crying out for a break. If I could just mug up my lines and face the camera without any exertion, there would be no problem at all, but I become very involved, and every film takes its toll, however flippant the performance may seem.

Does that mean you lack technical expertise? If so, how do you plan to get into direction?
Technical expertise may help me only to project my emotions correctly but it cannot help me create the required emotions. As for directing a film, I'm not planning to do so for a long time to come... Not until I've had my long holiday.

When do you plan to go on this long holiday?
I don't know... The minute I finish all my current assignments I guess.

And when will that be?
February...March... Or maybe April.

Are you planning to have a baby in the near future?
Not for the present. It is too much responsibility, which I am not in a position to undertake at the moment.

But you aren't getting any younger?
Ursula Andress had a healthy baby at 42. I'm still a long way from that.

The general feeling is that you are cutting down on your assignments because of marriage...because you want to spend more time at home.

Unfortunately, because of the timing, it would seem the most logical conclusion, but it isn't true. I think an actress comes to a stage when she feels she is getting emotionally dry... I've reached this stage... I feel drained doing too many intense roles. The truth is, I'm at a phase when I feel the need to preserve myself for a more demanding performance. That's why I prefer doing lighter roles like Shart and Khamosh these days.

You've always professed to be a libber, but your personal life is a contradiction.

It might seem so apparently, but I can only assure you in full confidence that I have not done anything contrary to my beliefs, and I do not wish to go into the details. I still stand by everything I have said in the past.

But didn't you at one stage categorically state that you didn't need marriage?

Yes, I did, and I still think it wasn't necessary, but under the circumstances it was the more correct thing to do.

But by doing so you have let down a lot of your feminist fans.

I'm sorry if that has happened, but it is impossible for me to explain the details of what has happened. The lesson it has taught me is that while passing judgement on a situation one must look out for much more than meets the eye.

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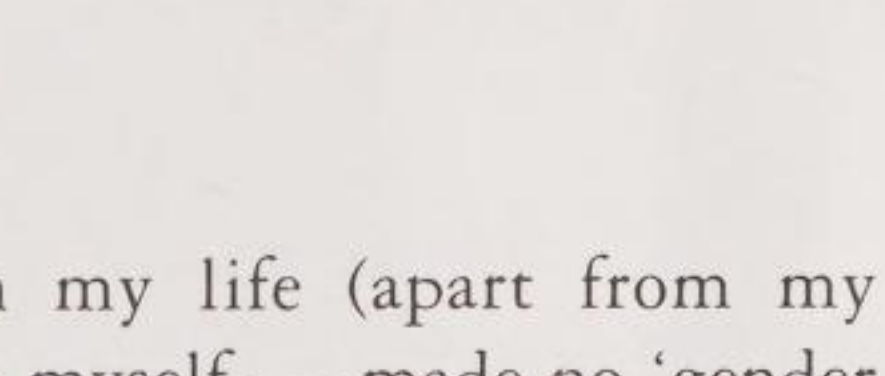
'Javed was the first person in my life (apart from my parents) who gave me space to be myself — made no 'gender demands' on me. I learned to give him space too. He is exactly the husband that was the boyfriend. There were no disconcerting aspects to discover after marriage. He will never attempt to dominate but he will not be dominated either!'



(Shabana Azmi)

1986

MITHUN CHAKRABORTY

He is the most sought after actor, is in a position where he can demand his price and is considered a lucky mascot by all his producers. Still, he is unhappy. Why?

He owns a plush apartment, a few limousines, a Caravan that drives him in style to his work and a bank balance that can survive three generations. Still, he is not satisfied. Why?

He is married to the girl of his choice, has a three-year-old doting son and parents who are proud of him. Dogs, his prized possessions, follow him everywhere and a dozen good friends will give their lives for him. Still, he is distressed. Why?

What is it that makes Mithun Chakraborty feel so persecuted? What is the fear that is hounding him which he can neither share nor come to terms with? Is Mithun turning paranoid?

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You are changing....
Yes, but I've not changed for my friends... My real friends, with whom I share my sorrows and happiness.

One feels that you are tense and irritated all the time. Is it because you are oveworked?
I think it is due to personal tensions... Overwork does not bother me. I'm addicted to hard work. But you are right, I do feel irritated all the time. It is because I have a lot of personal tensions.

And you carry your personal tensions to work?
Sometimes. When there is an overdose, it remains with me. But not always. For instance, today I'm happy... I think it has something to do with my temperament. I'm easily distracted and lead a distorted life.

Do you enjoy leading a distorted life?
See, the problem is much deeper. I've changed over the years because people have started taking advantage of me. I'm not saying that I'm a saint or I'm *bhola-bhala*, but I can't take their callous attitude anymore. It hurts me deeply and my suffering is more painful than what I went through during my struggling days.

Exactly. So if people who stood by you in your lean phase want to cash in on your success, what's wrong with that?
The tragedy is that those who stood by me are not taking advantage of my success. Do you understand what I mean? My old friends from Sion who have been through hell with me and who gave me sometimes five and sometimes 10 rupees to eat a square meal are not taking advantage of my present situation. It's outsiders who are doing so.

Deepak Bahry and some other producers stood by you during your struggling days.
Yes, these people have proved to me that they are my genuine friends. They made films with me even when I was a flop. These are friends I cannot forget. All of them - Deepak, B. Subhash, even Gautam... *Boxer* was my first film. But these friends stood by me.

So what is the problem? You have old friends who don't exploit your position and associates who stand by you in your lean phase. Then why are you so cynical?
You are misunderstanding me. I'm not against these people using me professionally. That is not my problem. I'm offended by the fact that they use me personally. I have been taken for a ride in a very, very big way and very often. That is why, except for a few friends with whom I share my problems, I've now decided to keep a low profile.

But you don't have to go about looking so unhappy. Don't you realise that after all, this is the kind of success you've been dreaming about all your life?
Yes, but it is frustrating. All I ever wanted was to be happy and share my success and fame with near and dear ones... But it has misfired. I'm going through a bad phase.

Are you making an effort to get out of this phase? It does not seem as if you are.
I tried my level best, but it is of no use. So now I have surrendered to it.

Surrendered to what?
To the circumstances. To my destiny. You will not believe me, but despite being the topmost star today, I'm not happy.

That's exactly what we want to know. Why aren't you happy? Surely you are not the only one who has problems.
It is not that. I have certain personal problems which I would rather not talk about. I have too many things on my mind. I think it is because I'm the only earning member in the family. I have too many responsibilities. I cannot say anything more.

But you are not financially insecure.
You see, the dream I had for my family has not been realised. Today, despite everything, everyone in my family is unhappy. I don't know why.

Are you responsible for this?
No, I'm not. I've done my best. But nor are the others responsible. I fell that destiny is playing hide-and-seek game with me. I don't know how to explain it but life isn't shaping out the way I perceived it.

Surely you don't fell dissatisfied professionally?
On the contrary, I feel more than satisfied. All I wanted was to become a celebrity. I didn't know that I would become the topmost star! The unfortunate bit is that I still haven't experienced the life I dreamt of... Deep down there is a vacuum.

Are you referring to a vacuum in your personal life - your marital life to be more specific?
When I say my family, I mean my entire family. Not just my wife and son. It is not as though only my marital life is important. No, not at all. My entire family is important. I don't see my dream for them coming true. The Mithun I had dreams for is not there. Something has misfired.

Have you analysed what?
I did, but could not find an answer. I feel that I won't get what I'm looking for. That is probably why I feel this tension in me. I know it is just a phase. Maybe I'll get over it soon. It is high time I did. People have been seeing me suffer for almost a year now. I think I should try to get over it soon. In fact, I feel I'm already getting over it. At some point or the other I must be strong enough to get off the hook.

Does success have anything to do with it?
Success has made me more humble.

Would you agree that you are repeating the same mistakes you made during your earlier phase?
Yes, I'm repeating the same mistakes. But I cannot change myself. I am a very weak person. Even today, if a friend who has helped me in my bad times asks me to help him financially, I will... No matter how much ever he requires, Call it a mistake. Call it a good thing.

Frankly, your way of working is ridiculous. Don't your producers complain about it?
Before I sign any film, I put all my conditions down on paper very clearly. All my producers know that I get up around 7 a.m. exercise for about two hours and then dub for one hour. I report for my first shift at about 10.30. At 4.30 I leave for my second shift. By 9.30 I must pack up. If it is a night shift, I work till 11 p.m. It is very clearly explained so that nobody can complain about it later. Why should any of my producers complain? After all, I work for about 16 hours a day! There has not been a single shooting which has been cancelled because I was too tired to work. People like to repeat me in their films because I'm very sincere as far as my work is concerned. Let's face it. Though a lot of us have seen success, what actually matters is behaviour. And our industry can tolerate a bad actor, but not a bad man.

But nobody has ever held that against you. They only feel that you are too tense and keyed up all the time.
This is because I have some personal problems which hound me and leave me restless every now and then. I cannot elaborate on this. It's true that I'm sad. I feel unhappy... I try and fight this depression to the best of my ability. For instance, today, I have fought back, so I am happy. Maybe tomorrow when I will be weaker, I will not be able to fight back. As a result, I will cringe and suffer.

Will signing fewer films help you to solve your personal problems?
It's all bullshit that I'm signing many films. Next year, I will have only 12 films on hand. Once upon a time I had 66 films on hand... It's all destiny. I will always remain totally dependent on destiny.

You are also dependent on your friends for your happiness.
Yes, because they would do anything for me. I feel deceived by my parents and loved ones, but not my friends. I'm telling you, something somewhere has misfired.

You keep repeating this word 'misfired'. What exactly do you mean?
I do not know. Probably I do not know how to explain it, but I've tried my best... My level best.

You sound faithless.
I do not know. My deeds maybe responsible for this.

What do you normally do when you are disturbed?
Either I cry or I shout.

Aren't you overdramatic?
I'm very sensitive. I have tremendous faith in people. I always feel that the other person is like me, but it is not possible. Like a foolish person I trust the whole world, but I only get disillusioned and go through the whole gamut of hurt and pain.

The old Mithun had the capacity to laugh at himself.
I still laugh at myself, don't I?

It is a sad laughter. You used to be a crazy person, but you are not crazy anymore.
Okay, I'll become crazy. Give me another six months and I'll become absolutely crazy!

Let's talk about more pleasant things. What makes you happy?
Very small things from my loved ones... A tight hug from my son, Mimo or a phone call from a loved one makes my whole day. Just the memory of these beautiful moments keeps me happy all day. Similarly, even a small mistake from my loved one can ruin my whole day. I'm like that with everybody who matters to me. If you don't give me attention when I need it, I begin to sulk. I've had massive fights with friends on the most trivial matters. Of course I feel foolish now, but I'm like that. I'm crazy.

Aren't you very demanding? Don't you sometimes fear that your near ones will get exasperated and leave you?
I think so. One day they are going to get so fed up of me that they will leave me. I often fear that all of them are going to leave me.

Is this feeling of insecurity because of the fact that your success is not going to last forever?
My ambition has become absolutely saturated. My craving in life was to become a celebrity, but God has made me the topmost star today. I've got more than what I wanted. The future does not bother me.

But it should, now that Amitabh Bachchan is back on the scene...
Hmm... Amitabh is way beyond me. He is too, too big. And for someone like me, to even talk about him will be bullshitting. Today, every hero in our country has to accept Bachchan as a happening... He is an event. He has happened to the industry and he will always stay on the throne. Be it in person or in proxy.

Miracles do happen. Haven't you replaced Jeetendra to a certain extent in the South banners?
I haven't. Jeetu is still very much there. He is now in a position where he can either choose or not choose to do a film. Nobody can replace Jeetendra. *Woh to logon ki nas mein bas gaya hai*. The man has had his century. As for replacing him in the South banners, I've only two films. To be frank, shooting in Madras is not my scene because I can't stand the Madras climate. My friends call me *Pasina* Chakraborty.

Do you feel threatened that some newcomer could replace you, like you replaced somebody?
I told you that I'm not ambitious. If I was, I would have been thinking about my rivals all the time. But I don't. I'm too busy thinking about my personal problems.

You don't even feel threatened by Govinda, who is referred to as 'the poor man's Mithun'?
Everyone said that I was 'the poor man's Amitabh', and I took it as a compliment. I'm sure Govinda takes it as a compliment too. I've met this boy on a few occasions and found him very hardworking. I like him.

Govinda reminds one of the Mithun of earlier days.
I feel like that too. His eyes have hope. He has a kind face. It's inexplicable, but every time I meet him, something good comes out from my heart for him.

Do you worry about the future?
My way of thinking is very different. Today I'm a hero. A big hero. I'm the topmost star of India, or whatever you want to say. God forbid, but tomorrow if I'm a flop, I will not approach my friends for help. If I do, I'll be wise enough not to ask for hero roles. I'll ask them to give me second lead roles. Suppose I don't stand a chance in the second lead roles also, then I'll play negative roles. But why think of all this now? Today, I've made a name for myself which will go on for a long, long time... Basically I'm a farmer at heart. My roots are in the village and I think I'll find happiness only when I return to my roots.

In short, you are trying to recreate your past.
Yes, you are right. I'm trying to recreate my past.

But just a short while ago you said that in the past you were fantasizing about your future?
But now that I've seen my future I'm thinking of my past. While in the past I had a fantasy about my future, which has not come true. I had a dream which remains unfulfilled. So now I feel that my past was much better and it is best that I return to it.

Instead of being so pessimistic, why don't you build another dream — this time a more realistic one?
I don't think I can... My dream can never come true. It is so weird and abstract...it's almost impossible.

Does your dream comprise of people or circumstances?
I don't have answers for such questions. My dream is like a fairy tale and fairy tales don't come true. I've been dreaming about a farm I want to purchase. Let's hope I get this farm. It is my only hope for happiness. I think about the farm even when I'm sleeping.

Do you sleep well?
Quite well I'd say. I sleep for about five or six hours.

With or without tranquilzers?
Sometimes with tranquilzers, sometimes without.

And what do you dream about?
I dream of long driveways without obstruction.

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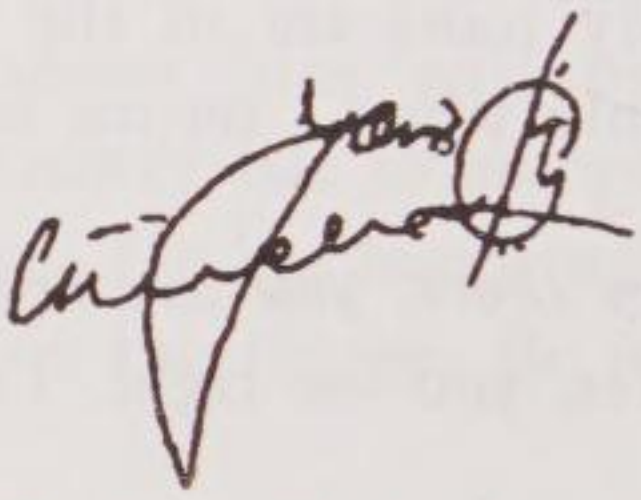
'I remember clearly the day we did this interview. It was at `Mehboob Studio' around evening time. I was at my lowest ebb, unable to concentrate. It was the most disturbing time of my life. My silence during a lot of questions is understandable. I had no solutions to my problems. Reading it all once again was like touching a raw nerve. I didn't know that old wounds hurt...'



(Mithun Chakraborty)

1986

REKHA

We are meeting after a gap of almost eight years. In the interim, Rekha has acquired a new persona. To quote one of her co-stars, 'Rekha today, has succeeded in making people believe only what she wants them to believe of her...'

In the interview that follows, which can be best described self-analyical, Rekha breaks her long silence and talks of the multiple events that have been instrumental in changing her.

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It is over a decade since Sawan Bhadon. ***What does the sum total of all these years and films mean to you?***
Whatever has happened since *Sawan Bhadon* is history. Everybody knows it by heart. However, what I've gone through personally, only I know. Some of it people do know, but some will always remain with me. I don't wish to disclose the changes I've gone through. Probably sparks of it show in my performances. But considering that I was far from perfect when I started, I must say, I've been exceptionally lucky. When I joined the industry I was overweight, my diction was bad and I worked in the wrong films. Today, when I watch my old films I ask, 'who is this girl?'. So much so that even my voice and the expression in my eyes is different now.

But why should this be so surprising? Isn't it only natural to change?
It is, except that in my case it has been a complete transformation. Life was moving too fast then. I was working my head off, was being pushed, literally dragged from one studio to another. They used to feed me in the car and if I was sleeping, I was jolted awake because the shot was ready. It was a terrible thing to do to a 13-year-old. That is why I often ran away from the sets. *Main chidh ke kaam karti thi* and this reflected in my work. It was almost as if I was two persons. One, the superficial actress, who everyone saw on the screen and the other, the real me, who nobody knew.

What do you mean by superficial?
I was raw, unpolished. I want to cringe when I see the double chin, the tyres in Kashmakash. The face was okay, but then you can't call a round ball of flesh, beautiful?

Do you find the time to watch your old films?

There is this particular cassette called *Rekha O'Rekha*, a collection of my songs over the years. It's a horrible cassette. What I can't understand is, if they had to make a cassette, why couldn't they have selected better films? This one, has my worst songs. The other day my sister was watching the tape and I said, 'My God, how can you possibly watch this?' She explained that everyone was watching it and it was a very popular cassette, ranking amongst the top ten. This proves that they just want to watch Rekha, anything — good, bad or ugly.

You often talk about being a special person. What exactly do you mean?

Not everybody can be special. I believe I am. Even as a child, I believed that I was the blessed one. The most unusual of things happen only to me. Every episode is like history. Every time life is going hunky-dory, I'm prepared for a crisis. Something drastic always happens. I get hold of situations. Even a mirror has a scratch but not me. I believe in completing experiences. In that way, I feel like a super woman.

It is said that even EST is all about completing experiences.

Really? I don't know anything about EST. But I feel only unhappy people go to EST. People who are troubled, who can't sleep at night, who can't solve their problems... I am my own EST. Whatever I've learnt in life is through my own experiences. Recently, my brand new Honda met with an accident. The car was smashed to bits but surprisingly nothing happened to either my driver, my secretary or to my dog, Pisti. They were returning after dropping me at the airport. When I was informed about the accident in Delhi, my reaction was clinical. I was calm! This, even though I love cars. Nothing, and no person is worth shedding tears for.

Yes, but there was a time when you would cry at the slightest provocation. Yogeeta Bali once said, that even before she could tell you her problems, you would start shedding tears for her.

Those days every tear was like a pearl drop. Now, every tear I shed gives me an extra wrinkle. Why should I get

wrinkles? I want to look my best. During those days I believed that love is the answer to all my problems. Today, I feel that success is the answer. When you are successful, even when you say something wrong it seems right. Everyone says that the top is a lonely place. It's the attitude that makes all the difference. Of course I cherish my privacy. But cannot live without interactions. Human being is a social animal and needs other human beings.

But you did go through a phase when you wanted no interaction. You prefer to live in exile.
Yes, but I changed. It may take me six months, or six years, but I will carry my own cross. I was anti-social only with the press. Not that I trust them now, especially the gossip magazines.

Your producers complain you are inaccessible.
People cannot approach me on their own. When I desire I make myself accessible like this, (she snaps her finger). And that's how it should be after reaching a particular position.

It's been 11 years before the camera. Aren't you bored?
I don't know the meaning of that word. Everyone keeps mentioning it — my sisters, my friends. Even a five-year-old rolls his eyes and says, 'I'm bored!' What is happening to everybody? What is happening to the world? Here, I have one million things to do and I don't have the time. I feel so bad that I don't have the time anymore to go through the 'Cosmopolitan' magazine in detail. I don't have time to have a leisurely bath, something I truly enjoy. How can I be bored of the camera? I feel I've just started. I feel like a newcomer.

Would you say you have understood the characters you've played in your films?
Not at that time, I was too young. Barkha Bahar, demanded an innocuous girl to gradually turn into a hard-core woman. I was too raw for the role.

What about Kalyug ***and*** Vijeta***?***
I would do these films much better if I were to do them now. When I did *Kalyug*, I didn't know the meaning of an income tax raid. I didn't know to what extent it can affect human beings, more so a woman. The scene when officers

invade my bedroom and rummage through my personal belongings, I had to get hysterical. If I had to shoot the same scene today, I'd be able to lend a different intensity. Still, when I see *Kalyug* now, I am surprised to notice that I've been successful in projecting the fright and frustration required in the scene. Director Shyam Benegal explained the scene so well that it wasn't difficult. What's funny is that when I was raided in real life, that was not the way I reacted. I sat very calm because I didn't want to reveal my fear to them.

Is it true that the raid lasted for seven days and you were treated rather shabbily?

They were supposed to begin the search only after I returned home. But when I landed, they had entered my room and ripped apart everything. That's the first time I realised that nothing material is yours. Nothing belongs to you. Here I was clinging to the smallest pebble, saying, 'I.' How wrong I was. Still, it made me feel proud that they could take everything away, but leave my soul and mind untouched. My Moral Science teacher in school said, 'This book... This pencil, does not belong to you.' I never understood what she meant. My teacher was right. Nothing material in this world belongs to you.

You sound philosophical...

I had paid my wealth, advance, and other taxes. But just because there is nobody to look after me, they decided to harass me. My mother, watching them slash my room to pieces was creating a *maatam*. She told me later that she felt miserable just watching them. They've taken away my life's savings — my exquisite jewellery, but you cannot take away my talent. That was in November '82. That day I set a goal for myself and I set a time limit. All that they've taken away from me, I'll earn 10 times more. I don't regret the experience. It happened to me at the right time. Their hard-core attitude is responsible for what I'm today.

Almost all stars go through a phase when they feel that they have given much more of themselves to their work, as compared to what they've got in return. How about you?

I don't feel I have been exploited at all. That's how our film industry is. Take it or leave it. Here, you are either very successful, or not at all. You are either doing double-shifts,

going mad, tearing your hair or just sitting at home watching the video. It's a cold-blooded rat-race, so those who say that they are getting organised and doing only two films a year, are talking nonsense. The truly successful people just have to go the Mithun, Govinda way. It may affect your health, your mind and your heart, but it's now or never. You have to be an extra strong person, almost a super human to survive in this industry.

And would you say you are happy?

I am happy, but I am not absolutely content. The day I'm absolutely content, I might as well die. I've always been a happy person, but what is true happiness, I'm discovering now. Earlier, I enjoyed being a clown. I enjoyed making people laugh. I do that even now, but I'm more positive. Problems don't make me unhappy. The day all my problems will end, life will become very boring. I function superbly under duress. It's almost as if my antennae perk up. But what makes me absolutely happy is seeing, feeling and looking the best. You might feel that I'm sounding narcissistic, but unless I feel nice and happy, how can I make others around me happy? Not many people want to face this, but I do. I have the guts to admit that I come first. Even a slight headache can put me off completely. Then I cannot focus. Health is such a delicate thing. You never know what's going to hit you. In the past, I used to shoot for rain scenes effortlessly. Sometimes for 20 days a month. Now, suddenly after all these years I've discovered that I'm asthmatic. I'm allergic to dust. Of course, asthma is to a great extent psychosomatic. So now, I've disciplined myself to take precautions before hand. The minute I know I'm shooting a rain scene, I take my medicine.

Do you feel depressed?

In the past when I would be depressed, I wouldn't be unfunctionable. I would sit in an empty room for days and stare at the ceiling. I would not sleep, eat, or even comb my hair. Absolute madness! How could I have been so stupid? I was doing it for a particular reason, a particular person. And the person was not even aware of my suffering. He was not physically present to see what I was going through. Just because he had in the past, given me lots of love, I want more and more like a spoilt child. It's not fair to the relationship. When I realised that all the weeping is doing

me no good, I stopped crying. Nobody should affect you to such an extent.

In other words, you've become more practical now.
Surely, what is important is to know what you want and to set your priorities right. At least, I believe that. I've always believed in setting my own rules. My independence is my greatest strengh. I've enjoyed it ever since I was a child. What do people mean when they say don't hurt? What about the hurt I go through?

Your impressions on Sanjeev Kumar's death in a recent interview were heartfelt.
I was very fond of him, even though I wasn't very close to him. I admired him as an actor. His death hit me because he was too young to die. People say that he died of an heart-attack. I say that he died of heartbreak! I feel it is better that he died, because he was so sad, so lonely. Nobody would go and see him. And those who did, did so for selfish motives.

But why did all this make you think of your own death?
I don't know. A few days ago we were shooting my death scene for *Sada Suhagan*. I had to lie on the floor covered with a white cloth, on top of which was a red cloth, covered with flowers. During the scene, two dozen people had to come and put garlands over my body. I felt so suffocated. I signalled to my make-up man and said, I was feeling heavy. Sanjeev Kumar must have felt the weight too. Who knows what one goes through after death? I have told my family that when I die, I don't want any fanfare. I've told them they should donate every single part of my body to the hospital.

In retrospect, how do you react to your one-time impulse of swallowing Tik-20 and attempting suicide?
That's not true. I didn't attempt suicide. But yes, considering the phase I was going through, I could have done anything. I had strong suicidal tendencies. As a child, I would often go and sleep on the road and was always saved in the nick of time. Strange, I never thought of an easier and more peaceful way of dying. I wanted to jump off from the terrace. It never occurred to me that if I was unsuccessful, I would become a liability for the family. Now, of course, I feel ashamed of all this. Life is too short. I can't believe I've

crossed 30. It feels like only a few years ago I was 19. Ideally, I'd wish to be just that, then I could marry, have kids. I believe in having kids at a particular age, without any stretch marks showing...(laughs) and continue working.

How do you look upon your blasphemous statements in the past?
Have I made such statements? Like what?

You've said you wanted a baby out of wedlock...
I didn't.

You did in 1976.
Never. I've never said that. If that has appeared in print, I've been misquoted.

Journalists who interview you feel that you are never satisfied with any feature done on you.
Absolutely true. And I have my reasons. I've always been misquoted.

Always? Surely everyone cannot misunderstand you?
Everyone cannot misunderstand, but everyone cannot understand my answers either. They have their own interpretation. That's the difference.

Another bold statement you made was, 'It's a fluke I've never got pregnant.'
That, I've said, definitely.

Aren't you embarrassed by these statements now?
I laugh it off. It was my childishness, I know what I am today, and I'm not ashamed of what I was.

Of the new breed, who do you think is the most promising amongst the actress?
After *Solva Sawan* I had spoken about Sridevi. She is the best. Madhuri Dixit is promising too. I've seen her photographs and she's got 'star quality'. I think Farha also very good. But she has to be careful. Everything will contribute to what will happen in future. Her experiences, how she handles them, her luck and the kind of films she signs will make a difference.

Does it make you insecure that in a few years time you will not be a glamorous star anymore?

In *Karz* Simi played a character is past 40 but still glamorous. I'll play the same kind of roles. I'll be simple, but in some roles, I'll be glamorous too. How can I cut off glamour from my life? Glamour is a part of me.

Like Sharmila Tagore?

Please don't compare me with anybody. I don't see myself as Sharmila at all. At one time we were all very fascinated by her. Today, I can visualise myself as only me. I'm so proud of what I've become, that I would not like to be anybody but myself. When everybody wants to be like me, why would I want to be like somebody else? There are living proofs around me. I'm the original.

Are you afraid of old age?

I don't fear old age. You can grow old at 16, and you can be very young at 60. Look at Dev Anand. Look at Sitaradi. Look at Noorjehan. Look at Jane Fonda. I'm not scared of dying, but I don't want to die. I want to age gracefully. When the time comes, I will not dress ridiculously or wear gaudy colours. You wait and watch when I grow old, I'll give a completely new look to myself. *Ab paida ho hi gaye hoon* to be a trendsetter, *to kuch karke hi jayenge*.

Would you dye your hair?

Chee... That's something I needn't worry about. Black hair is heriditary in the family. Even at this age my mother has jet black hair.

A co-star pointed out that you are very finicky about details.

I get very irritated when the ambience of a film does not match the character. Our films portray a foreign returned girl and then put *desi* props on her dressing table — a Charmis bottle (empty), Indian cologne (empty) mostly packed from the producer's house. Abroad, they take care of the smallest details. Experience has taught me to quietly place my own colognes on the dressing table. What's irritating is that film after film, I'm required to shoot in the same bungalow, with the same ugly chandeliers and the same gold backdrop. I wonder when they will realise that a beautiful atmosphere makes all the difference. When I was a child, my mother would say that I should have been a

princess. I had *shahi* habits, wanted to bathe in jasmine oil and *chandan*. I believe that the only way to enjoy life is to treat yourself perpetually like a queen. To believe that you are the best. I love beautiful things, fragrance and good atmosphere. And therefore even for my shootings I carry *mogras* and *agarbatis*.

It is said that you are obsessed about your new house.
Yes, but because these days I'm too busy, my house is not looking its best. It is neglected.

You are obsessed with your dog, Pisti ***too.***
Pisti is a baby. I treat Pisti like any other human being. I'd treat a flower like that. But there is no comparison between my home and Pisti. I may neglect my home, but even if I'm very busy, I don't neglect Pisti.

You keep talking of reincarnation.
Yes, I'm quite psychic. When *The Reincarnation Of Peter Proud* was released, I would see it every second day. At one time, I was curious about my past life, but lately, I'm not. I believe that heaven and hell is all here.

If you had the choice to rearrange your life, what are the things you would like to change?
I'd like to be born slim. If for two days I eat a normal meal, I look like a ball. I have so many slim friends, who eat four times a day and nothing happens to them. My metabolism is such that I have to be on a constant diet. I'd like my long hair back. I cut them in a moment of kinkiness, because I wanted a change. I know it will grow again, but it will take six months. And finally, I wish I wasn't hypersensitive. I'm changing, but even then, I go through so much pain that for that particular moment, I'm unconsolable.

Would you agree that in Maang Bharo Sajna ***you glorify the Other Woman?***
To be the Other Woman is bad, or at least that's what society says. But because Rekha is the Other Woman, they feel it is okay. That's the kind of faith any fans have in me.

Isn't that dangerous?
Well, maybe it is but that's how they feel about me. I feel proud, yet frightened. I will never do anything to set a bad example to the world. I will not do roles that promote

crime. Ultimately all my performances convey a message. Today, I can choose, but I cannot dictate my roles. People are not exactly writing roles for me. Maybe they say they are, but the roles they are writing are not impressive enough. The day is not far when they will though.

Producers feel that if you lower your price, you can make room for a lot more intersting proposals.

Lots of people say lots of things. I'm not here to take their advice. The fact remains that I'm still getting the price I demand, and I'm doing 20 films at a time!.

Director Lekh Tandon has stated that had the two of you vibed better, Agar Tum Na Hote ***could have given a better film.***

Not just *Agar Tum Na Hote*, I feel I could have performed better in so many other films had the director trusted me. But the directors suffer from a complex. They shudder at the very thought of talking to me. The minute I enter the sets, in nervousness they present me an *ulta* dialogue sheet. What can I do? I don't enjoy this, surely. I do get upset, but I'm a professional. There are times when to put them at ease, I'm friendly. Then they behave as if they are my childhood friends. Sorry, I'd much rather give a bad performance, than let any one take me for granted.

What is it about you that all your so-called friends (Zarina Wahab, Sridevi) let you down in print?

There's no point discussing names. Isn't it obvious that all of them copy me? From my blouse-necks, the way they hold their saree *pallu*, the way they wear their bangles and *bindi* is exactly like me. I started wearing my *bindi* in-between my eyebrows, and now everyone is doing it. I don't want to elaborate. If they have short memories, it's their fault. I take my tips from Sophia Loren.

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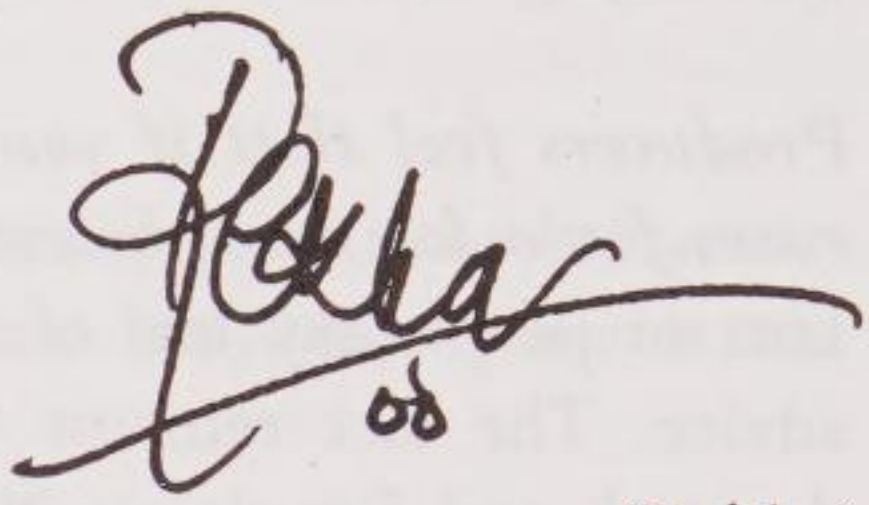
'This was my peacemaking interview after my long imposed ban. It was a timely decision because after all the concoction and misquoting I was made a victim of, I felt healed reading quotes about myself that I could identify with. The author has chronicled my career at all the turning points and even when communication snapped, affection didn't. I realised that not talking to the press (especially in this case) and

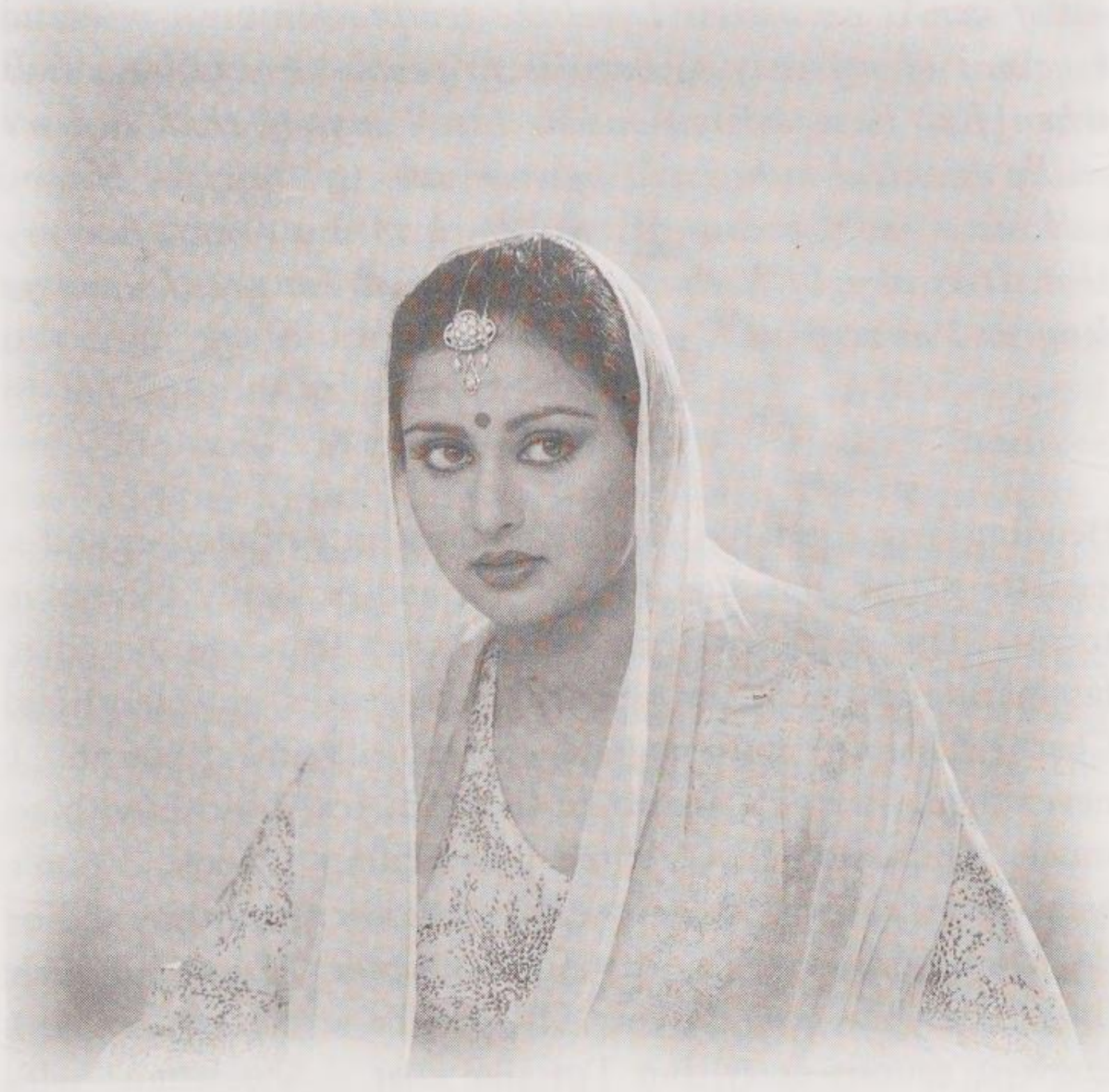
expressing my point of view was my loss. It's only when you lose something that you realise its true value. The author has always contributed to my stories — reported what I said and also what I wanted to but could not articulate.'



(Rekha)

1986

POONAM DHILLON



'Don't interview me,' she says wearily. 'I'm tired of these question-and-answer sessions.' A drained, bored look, stemming obviously from an overdose of interrogation, greets me, but it gives way to one of hope as she asks, 'Can't you just sit and talk to me instead?' Kicking the high-heeled sandals from her well-pedicured feet, she reclines on the sofa and lets out a deep sigh. 'All of last month, I was shooting outdoors. It feels so awful... I feel I'm losing contact with people close to me. I feel so tense, almost uprooted.' She is in reflective mood, yet unable to concentrate. Time and again she glances at the door, wondering when she'll be called on the sets. Reassured that there is still time, she stretches her legs and continues, 'Recently, I was reading a book which said, 'It is more important that people respect you than adore you.' I liked that. The temptation to be loved by everybody is in all of us. As an actress I feel the temptation even more, so I go out of my way to be nice to people around me. But when I'm in a solemn mood, I tell myself that it isn't really essential to be loved by everyone. It is alright if they call me a snob, because I rush back to my room after my shot. It is alright if I'm unpopular and not doted upon so long as I'm respected.'

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Bending over the table, below the huge pile of clothes and a cassette player, she digs out a book and excitedly throws it to me. 'This is the book in which I read that line. I find it fascinating to read the personal experiences of celebrities. Charlie Chaplin's autobiography is my all-time favourite. I never thought that a comedian like him could write with so much compassion. Every time I'm reading a book, I don't want it to end... I delay reading the last few pages... I'm desperate when I come to the last chapter. I linger at each line, I hate the thought that I'll soon be at the last word. I know it sounds crazy, but I'm like that...' She laughs self-consciously, then after a long pause adds, 'You know, I don't look it, but I'm a very complicated person, quite difficult to get along with. Anyone who knows me intimately will agree. I tire my friends. Personally, I'd never choose Poonam Dhillon for a friend.' Her chatter is repeatedly interrupted by her vibrant laugh. Then, very softly, she adds, 'Maybe I'm over-reacting. Maybe I'm not all that bad.'

Her reactions are spontaneous, though confusing. The 23-year-old spirited girl under the mask of a brooding star emerges. You cannot ignore her. She is wholesome, persistent, cynical. There is a distinctive restlessness in her. Contemplation weighs heavy in her conversation. What she is going through is something most stars go through at some stage of their career. It's a feeling of exhaustion. Seven years of swift stardom have left her panting. The first flush of excitement is over. Poonam is now questioning her goals, identifying her various relationships. She confesses that she has grown, changed, evolved a fuller, richer person today.

Home; 9 a.m.: Utter confusion. Poonam Dhillon sits on an uncomfortable stool, trying to paint her eyes. 'I can never do my make-up properly when I'm in a hurry,' she tells us. Her sister Reshma, standing aside in a pink nightie, giggles unabashedly at her sister's trauma. 'It's a mad house until Poonam leaves for shooting. I can never study peacefully as long as Poonam is at home.' The small room is filled with people. Her mother, her dress-designer, her tailor. A *dhoti*-clad man measures the pistachio crepe silk and puts it down, saying emphatically, 'Impossible. You can never get a full suit from this much material.' Poonam sulks, then turning to her mother asks, 'Now, what to do?' 'What about a sleeveless *kurta*?' her mother suggests. The tailor measures the material again. 'Hm... Maybe, but I don't promise.' Poonam rushes from one room to another. Her mother trails behind her with, 'Do you want me to send you lunch...? Did you take your *lassi*...?' A mango vendor waits outside the flat. 'Poonam, do you want to take these mangoes?' 'No... no... I'm very late.' Poonam screams while shutting the elevator.

In the car, on the way to the location she says, 'It's strange how mothers all around the world are the same. All they worry about is their children's comfort... their food. I often wonder what sort of a mother I will make. When my mother is strict and over-protective about me, I hate it. I decide that when I have kids, I will be more liberal with them. I will be more of a friend. Though, frankly, I'm not very certain if I will, because in my relationship with my younger sister, my reactions are often as neurotic and hysterical as my mother's!

'Once during the recent riots, my sister got stuck at her

college and had to shack up at the college hostel for the night. I didn't sleep the whole night. In the morning I refused to leave for work until she had returned. My mother tells me that even as a little girl I was very responsible towards my sister. Once, when I was five-years-old, there was no one at home and there was a power breakdown in the neighbourhood. My sister had wet her bed. I cleaned the mess, but I could not tie her nappie, so I went stumbling in the darkness to my neighbour's house and asked them to help me. I'm shy of saying this, but both she and my brother are among the few people I really love.

'Yet, I've been through a phase when I've hated my sister intensely — and all because she was my *chamchi*. Everything, absolutely everything I did, she wanted to do too! She'd tag behind me, follow me wherever I went. What made it worse was my mother's insistence that I take her everywhere with me. I felt very foolish because none of my other friends tagged their younger sisters with them. For her ribbons, her shoes, her school bag, for everything, she was dependent on me. Even if she had to go to other room she'd sulk and say, 'Poonam, you come with me.' Today, I feel we've reversed our roles. I'm the one who's constantly begging her to tag along and she is avoiding it! Also, in matters like shoes and belts, now I'm seeking her advice. If I ask her whether it should be the pink or the brown, she'll frown and say, 'both are equally bad.

'My childhood memories consist of tentative homes, new faces, new friends. My father was in the Air Force so we never had a permanent house. Later, of course, we settled down in Chandigarh, and Daddy would fly down on weekends to meet us. My mother stayed with us. On her part, it was a sacrifice but we were too young to realise it. Sometimes, when I return from a hard day's work and we have a difference of opinion, I feel very drained. I expect my family to be sympathetic towards me just because I'm exhausted. I accuse them of not understanding the stress my profession inflicts on me. To which they say, 'If you can't cope with your career, then give it up. We never asked you to become an actress.' And they are right. The choice was mine. I wanted to be an actress. So now I must be able to ride out my stress on my own.

'Overall, they give me a long rope. Neither of my parents

are nags. It isn't an over-liberated, bohemian household either where everyone leads their own life. I'm pulled up when I do something wrong and I'm answerable to my parents. For years to come I'll remember the thrill of buying this house... The day when my family came to Bombay. It was such solace to know that in the evening, I'd be returning to my own home, my own people.'

Chandivali Studio: In a 10 x 10 room, her make-up man re-touches her make-up, then as she sees the small crop of pimples on her right cheek, he sighs deeply, 'Why don't you eat a few more mangoes?' he says sarcastically, while dabbling extra pink on her cheek. 'What nonsense!' she retorts immediately, pushing his hand away from her face. 'Would you believe I tasted my first mango of this season just yesterday?' 'And what about all those chocolates?' he asks. She turns around aggressively and grabs the make-up man's hand. 'I bought slabs of chocolates from America but I swear I've not touched a single piece. Only this morning, after almost a whole month, I tasted a small bite from Reshma's share. That too because she insisted.' She lets go the make-up man's hand and grumbles, 'Everybody is so cruel to me just because I've got a few pimples on my face. They make it seem like a crime. What kind of a life is this anyway, if one cannot eat mangoes and chocolates?' Her staff listens, amused. The dress designer takes over. She helps her wear the heavy ornaments and the Rajasthani costume. For a long while they argue about how to drape the *dupatta*. 30 minutes later, she is ready, and sits down to eat her lunch. She is uncomfortable with the innumerable bangles on her arms, and pouts, 'How can anyone eat like this?'

What kind of an employer do you make? I ask her. Is your staff frightened of you? 'Not in the least. On the contrary, I am the one who is frightened of annoying or hurting them. I don't change my staff easily. It takes me a long time to adjust to new people. And if I'm going to be with someone from morning to evening, I should get along. I try and be fair towards them, and I think, I am, except for a stray incident when I've thrown a tantrum or lost my temper. I feel protective towards those who serve me and would be surprised if they didn't feel the same towards me.

Do you feel incompetent because you are not a dancer? Her reaction is not defensive as I had expected. She merely stares

into space. 'So many of our heroines are bad dancers. I'm probably one of the many. It isn't that I cannot dance at all. It's just that I'm not terribly graceful. I'm aware of this shortcoming, that's why I'm taking special lessons from dance director, Oscar. From the beginning of my career, I've preferred to sign fewer films which offer me good money instead of signing innumerable films for a meagre price. Today, I'm aware that I'm stuck with the label of just a pretty face and no talent. I cannot do anything about this allegation overnight. Maybe, I've been careless about it myself, that's why everyone makes this sweeping statement about my 'lack of talent'. The trouble is that because one person has labelled me a bad actress, everyone will believe it. Nobody has the confidence to seek beyond that. This attitude of flowing with the tide frustrates me, but what can I do? It's not that I think I'm the best actress around. I'm aware that I'm not an exceptional actress. But, I'm certainly better than what I'm made out to be. Technically, I've improved a lot over the years and am certain that I will improve further. How can I perform when I'm never offered a role that demands performance? It's ironical, but those who are actresses are striving to prove themselves as stars and vice versa.'

Evening: There is some talk of the unit extending their shooting after the normal shift ends at 6 p.m. Poonam argues with her director. 'I can't do an extension today. I have to go for a function at 8 p.m. all the way to town.' The hero of the film, Kumar Gaurav, also has reservations. 'Not today,' he repeats. 'I'm not feeling too fit. I can't work overtime.' The three of them discuss the problem, finally the director agrees on a pack-up. In her room, rubbing Johnson's oil all over her face, she says, 'I hate doing extensions. If you are working late once in a while it is understandable but when it happens so often, and that too simultaneously at all your shootings, you feel disgusted. Directors must understand that actresses have commitments to people outside the film world too. One cannot continue to break commitments and expect it not to hamper relationships. As it is, this profession allows very little time for friendship. On Sundays, my off-days, I'm constantly torn between wanting to spend my time with my family and wanting to visit friends. My parents expect that I will stay home one day in a week. Yet, being my only free day, I long to see my friends

too. When I'm with one, I feel guilty about not being with the other.'

Andheri Highway: Suddenly our car stops. '*Petrol nahi hai*,' the driver tells Poonam. '*Magar kal hi to dalvaya tha*,' she answers. There is panic. 'Now what do we do?' she asks her hairdresser. 'Shall we go by a taxi?' For the next 20 minutes there is no taxi on the road. An auto-rickshaw whizzes past us. 'Let's go in the auto,' Poonam says excitedly. 'Nothing doing,' the driver interrupts. 'You will not travel in a rickshaw.' They argue affectionately about why she cannot travel in the rickshaw. Finally, the driver decides to walk half-a-mile and returns in a taxi. '*Dhyan rakhna*,' he tells Poonam. She sits in the cab giggling. 'I'm travelling by cab after a long time. It's fun, but I do feel insecure without my car and my driver.'

Her anxiety is apparent. Having to give constant directions of 'left' and 'right' irritates her. She is impatient when the vehicle bumps and jerks. Then, when the cabbie takes a wrong turn, she lets off her steam. 'Excuse me, Mr. Driver, but where exactly are you taking us?' We've taken a wrong turn. After 40 minutes we finally reach Bandra. 'Thank you for the long drive,' she tells the driver sarcastically. The driver mutters something under his breath. When she gets off, I tell the driver it was Poonam Dhillon who was sitting in his car. He is zapped. 'Why didn't you tell me earlier?'

Next day; The photo-session: In an outlandish outfit, her hair tied in a black turban, she sits on the SeaRock floor, posing for our camera. Sometimes lying on the steps, sometimes leaning near the pillar and sometimes hunching beside a tree, she poses unselfconsciously. There are 30-odd people watching the scene, and as recognition dawns, more people surround the place. Aren't you embarrassed that people are watching you? I ask. 'I was just thinking about this. You know, having make-up on your face is such a licence. I can do anything without having to give an explanation or feel self-conscious. It's the minute I take off my make-up, that the embarrassments reappears. I become self-conscious. It's complicated, a star has to be careful about her appearance, her health. It is often embarrassing because it seems as if one is being a fanatic. Drinking clean water, using clean towels is essential because so many people have invested so much money on you. It is essential that you look

after yourself. By my own judgement, I'm a reasonably well-balanced star. I'm not obsessed with either my image or my comforts. To date, I've never cancelled a single shooting just because I was ill or because I was caught up in some personal problem at home. In return, I've also not had any bad experiences with people, barring a stray instance which I'd like to forget.

'I often wonder if I would have been the same kind of person if I were not a film star. When I first came from Chandigarh, life here was so different, that I was in a state of shock. I remember those days, I would weep at the slightest provocation. Once I was at a party with a friend and tears were streaming down my cheeks. The people were so different, the atmosphere so alien... I thought to myself, 'This is my friend and he belongs to this world... and I don't know this world at all!' Those days I was shocked by almost everything. Today, I feel nobody is shocked by anything anymore. So now, if I meet someone who does get shocked I smile to myself and say, 'There is hope!'

Dusk: Our photosession ends. In the Ladies toilet, Poonam slips into her trousers, removes the turban and lets the long tresses fall. 'I'm famished,' she says. 'Let's grab a quick bite before we leave.' We enter the Coffee Shop amidst excited whispers of 'Poonam Dhillon. Poonam Dhillon.' Immediately, she becomes self-conscious. The mask slips on.

The daughter, the sister, the friend, I had seen at various stages during the day disappears and in place emerges the celebrity. Sitting in a low chair, she eats her pau-bhaji attentively. Then, suddenly she looks directly at me and asks, 'Are you an easy person to work with?' I stiffen. I'm defensive, having been asked such an unexpected question. Why should I answer, is my first reaction. Shame swamps me when I realise that that's exactly what I have been doing all day long — shooting questions without reservations. The thought frightens me. I ask her if she felt encroached upon having to answer all the questions I asked. 'It's okay,' she smiles. 'I'm quite used to it.'

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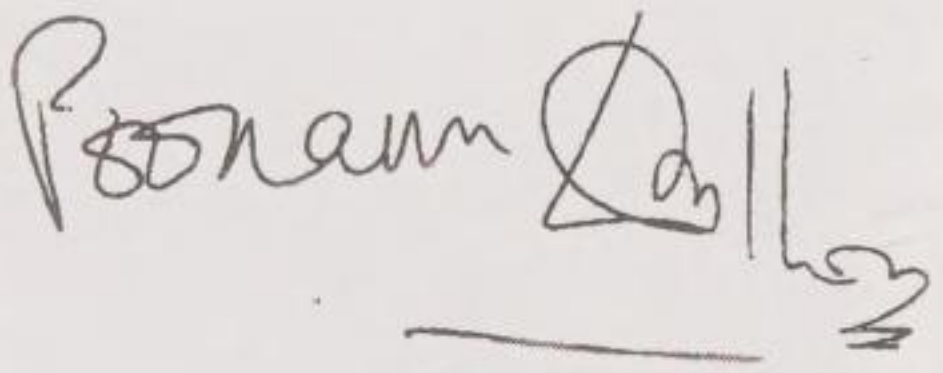
'Was all this a part of my life 13 years ago? It's difficult to imagine the hectic schedule today. My parents were alive,

now it's only memories. Stardom was a different ball game then, or better still, journalism exuded a different flavour only a decade ago. At that time, we didn't value those questions, took the observations and insights for granted. It's only now, after being assaulted with sex scandals and offensive questions on affairs and pornography, month after month, that one truly misses the sensitive and human interests stories. In my long exile from the arc lights, a few destructive stories have appeared on me in print. Stories written by strangers analysing me — stories full of character assassination. The beauty of an interview lies in the fact that the interviewer is able to draw the person without being intrusive. The star should be able to reveal about himself without being aware of it. The diary achieves that and is therefore special.'



(Poonam Dhillon)

1987

MEENAKSHI SHESHADRI

She has been cautious for far too long. Always said the right things and made the right moves. Not any more. Meenakshi Seshadri is changing. She is less edgy and no more on the defensive. Even her interviews are more peppy. The actress is definitely going through a personality transformation. 'She must be in love,' claims one of Meenakshi's directors. In the interview that follows, Meenakshi, quite out of character, chooses to talk about the good, bad and the ugly side of her colleagues.

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Subhash Ghai: He gave me my second film and the only platinum hit of my career to date. Subhash*ji* taught me to relax before the camera. It was only after *Hero* that I learnt to treat the camera as a friend. Unfortunately, the press cooked up fictitious stories and alleged a secret romance between us. Due to lack of communication after *Hero*, both Subhash*ji* and I inevitably said and did the wrong things whenever we met in public. Irrespective of how we are placed professionally, our personal relationship is civil. I went for his birthday bash recently. I was quite irritated when the media went on and on about why I wasn't cast in *Karma*. I will not pretend and say that I wasn't disappointed. I was disillusioned for a while, but got over it.

Sometime back, Subhash*ji* made a statement that I was desperate to do *Karma*. This is a very serious charge. If I was really desperate to work in the film, I would have made sure that I was in the project by hook or by crook. My not being in the film proves otherwise. Why just *Karma?* There are many more films I wanted to do, but I couldn't. But in case of *Karma*, the distributor's valid query was — 'Why not Meenakshi?' That's what created this controversy. Eventually, the name of the game is business because everyone is staking money. What's amazing is when my openness is misinterpreted. My nature is such that I don't attach too much importance to any one thing. Let's face it, things would have been much different if I did.

Sridevi: I am no competition for Sridevi. It isn't fair to draw comparisons unless you are in the same niche. To draw parallels between Sridevi and me is like comparing Catherine Hepburn with Marilyn Monroe... Not that this is a perfect example. The trouble with our films is that the heroine is

expected to do more or less the same thing in every film. I'm consciously trying to get out of this slot and I detest it when people have preconceived notions about me. Though Sridevi is very versatile and talented, producers select her for a particular type of role only. I feel that Sridevi and I belong to different moulds. My physique is not traditional... nor is my face. I often feel I look like a Russian, whereas I cannot imagine Sridevi looking like a foreigner. Even in the most Western outfits she looks very traditional... very South Indian to be specific. What Sridevi has and I lack is the initial springboard — a starting school. Don't forget that Sridevi has been acting since the age of five, whereas I have only a few years experience behind me. So that way she is a veteran and I take it as a compliment to be put on the same pedestal as her. Though we are starring in a film together, we have no combination scenes. But we did a dance together in *Joshilay* and I was surprised at the reactions of the people on the sets ... It was like having Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan in a climax scene! Actually, that was the first time I became conscious of my status as a star. I felt that if everyone around us was getting jumpy, we must be important.

I discovered that despite her professional image, Sridevi is very human. I find it easier to relate to Sridevi when she is in her make-up room, rather than when she is on the sets. She is more edgy on the sets. Off the sets, she can be quite funny. In fact, she is almost like a child when she bursts into peals of laughter and giggles. She even jokes with Shekhar Kapur, baits him and calls him 'Chandrashekhara'!

Javed Akhtar: The first time I met him was on the flight to Ladakh for the shooting of *Joshilay*. Shabana was accompanying him. For a long time we were just on greeting each-other terms. When we reached the location, we realised that the outdoor was more of a holiday than work. Everyday the entire unit would sit under huge umbrellas, playing scrabble or cards. Initially, I was a bit reserved. After all, it was my first brush with the much heard about Shekhar-Boney-Javed group. But after a few days, my sister and I got used to the atmosphere. We would spend the whole day sightseeing. Ladakh is a beautiful place. I later discovered that Javed is a brilliant conversationist. I thoroughly enjoyed his company. All of us were in high

spirits and this carefree mood was misrepresented by the correspondent of a women's magazine. When we returned to Bombay, the grapevine was buzzing with news of an alleged romance between Javed and me. What hurt me was that the journalist who started this story happened to be the director's sister! Soon, all the film magazines took cue and when I went to Bhind, for the shooting of *Dacait* a few months later, the press went wild with their fantasies. The rumours multiplied everytime I signed a new film penned by Javed.

Not many people know that Javed was initially dead against casting me in *Meri Jung*. He felt that I was a typical South Indian heroine. Maybe he has changed his mind after working with me in three films. As an actress, I have some complaints against Javed Akhtar. He has written only two heroine-oriented films so far (that is if the second one can be termed heroine-oriented) — *Seeta Aur Geeta* and *Betaab*. Even *Sholay* can't be called a heroine-oriented project, though Hema Malini's role in the film is memorable. But Basanti's character is by far the longest and strongest role compared to any other female character in a Salim-Javed script. I've often told Javed that he set patterns for his films. Probably, it would be more correct to say that the film industry set patterns for him. Writing is a responsible job, much more than acting. The stars get away with a lot. When a film fares badly, nobody blames the actors. People generally say that the film flopped because the script was weak, or the screenplay was poor. The writer invariably bears the brunt. I hope Javed will write a heroine-oriented subject one day. I'd love to work in that film. In a way, I think *Dacait* is the beginning...

Shabana Azmi: Initially, I was quite wary of her. She has an image which precedes her... Her literary background, fiery temperament and various National Awards. My strongest memory of her was when she stormed into the sets of *Awaara Baap* shortly after her marriage, wearing a *mangalsutra* and *sindoor*, put an arm around my co-star Rajesh Khanna and said, 'Beware, he's mine!' Then she made me sit on her lap and said, 'Naughty girl, why haven't you got in touch with us for so long?' I was stunned. I found her in turn eccentric, very friendly, very charming and very strange. For a long time Shabana was beyond my comprehension. In

this industry one is used to people who are either very reserved or overtly friendly, but a combination of both is rare. Those who don't know Shabana will find it difficult to deal with her. I can say that today my relationship with her is fairly stabilized. It's more of give and take, rather than she talking and me listening, as it was earlier. During the strike *morcha* recently, the two of us were discussing her *Anjuman* songs in the truck. She was surprised to know that I had studied her songs in such detail.

Amrita Singh: We've had some moments of great fun together. Amrita and I are temperamentally poles apart. In fact, she confessed that she tries to control herself in my presence. I'd say that our relationship is uncomplicated. That is why, I was startled when a journalist alleged that I had been nasty to Amrita in an interview. I called up Amrita to clear the matter. But she denied having said any such thing. She said that journalists often provoke stars to make controversial statements and I think she is right. Soon after, another reporter contacted me to find out how I reacted to Amrita's claim that Anil Kapoor didn't want to work with her because he was scared that she would steal the show from him. Fortunately, I didn't fall into the trap this time. To be fair, Amrita is very good in *Chameli Ki Shaadi.* She is a spontaneous actress. The remarkable thing is that she never gets carried away before the camera. In fact, I sometimes think that not being a dancer is an advantage for her. Unlike me, her expressions never seem exaggerated on screen. Being a dancer, one tends to give larger than life expressions sometimes. This is not so with Amrita.

Jeetendra: There were a lot of controversies when I signed *Hoshiyaar* with Jeetu. I think it was because everyone expected Sridevi to be in the film instead of me. When the film was released, the press went on and on about my costumes. I was criticized for wearing short dresses. Surprisingly, actresses who wear revealing clothes are never criticized! I accept that I was extremely conscious in the short dresses. That's because I was comparatively overweight those days. Of course, Jeetendra reassured me that I looked perfectly okay. He and his wife never failed to compliment me and in fact, Jeetu advised me not to lose weight. Perhaps he hasn't signed another film with me because I did! I don't know what kind of films we could do together because I'm

certainly not prepared to do another *Hoshiyaar* and Jeetu surely wouldn't want to do a *Sanjog* with me. So it has to be something in between *Hoshiyaar* and *Sanjog*. I'm not yet ready for grey hair!

Dimple: I met her for the first time during the shooting of *Allahrakha* and I was fascinated by her lustrous hair, glowing complexion and deep brown eyes. I feel the Dimple on-screen is completely different from the Dimple off-screen. Off-screen, Dimple is very casual and informal. She is outrageously frank and I like her immensely for it. I'm frank with her too, perhaps to a different degree. Both of us have complimented and criticized each other uninhibitedly. She told me that my hair is unhealthy and I should look after it better. She taught me how to use rollers and comb my hair properly. She even told me that my dress sense is atrocious! I told her that at least I have a better figure than her and she needs to be extra careful on that count. To be frank, our relationship has been 'quits'. Nobody rules anybody. If I say anything against her, she immediately retaliates and vice versa.

Amitabh Bachchan: He is a complex personality. It is either natural or a deliberate effort, but his presence is rather unsettling for those who are not too friendly with him. With Amitabh, he decides the pace of the relationship and the other person only takes cue. He is an awesome force. Nobody can ignore that. Even his aloofness is interesting. I analysed his handwriting during the making of *Shahenshah* and it was a startling study of the man. I don't know whether he agreed with my observations, but he was visibly surprised. Everyone who comes into contact with Amitabh has specific reactions. It's a culmination of these reactions that has gone into creating the special magic!

Manoj Kumar: My reflections of him are associated with his address. Juhu-Vile Parle Scheme is a very confusing colony for a novice. When I was a newcomer, Manoj*ji* had called me over to his place for a meeting, and I had gone there along with my sister and brother-in-law. All I remember is going round and round that colony for more than an hour. And while we were on this merry-go-round chase, I was wondering how strange it would be to become a film star and live in a confusing place like Bombay! I wasn't nervous at all and that's why Manoj*ji* confirmed me for *Painter Babu*

in just five minutes after our meeting. To be fair to the Goswamis, I was prepared for the hot pants in advance. Manoj*ji* has a particular concept of a heroine. The concept may be right or wrong. We have the most illogical situations in Hindi films, but to make a heroine wear hot pants in the snow, is a bit far-fetched! However, I'm grateful to Manoj*ji* for giving me a break. He gave me a very sound piece of advice, which he learnt from the late David. He said, 'The only way to be happy and content in this industry is to be in the industry and still remain out of it.' I think it is a very special quality and I've cherished it for all these years.

Jackie Shroff: We were introduced at ace photographer J.P. Singhal's house, where the pre-release publicity pictures of *Hero* were to be clicked. Not knowing what was expected of me, I had gone there without a make-up box or any other paraphernalia. Ayesha Dutt had come with Jackie and she lent me her clips because my hair was looking wild and unruly, as usual. Jackie and I shared a healthy and beautiful relationship during the making of *Hero*. But soon the press started linking us and we became conscious of one another. In the beginning, we found it very funny. We didn't really mind the gossip because it meant publicity for the film. But as the rumours grew, it turned ugly as Ayesha got upset. Jackie and I have come a long way now. Magazines say he has changed. I don't think he has... At least, not as a person, but I'm sure Jackie feels the same way about me. His attitude says so. That's why we are still friends. There are minor changes though. He has shaved off his moustache and I have cut my hair!

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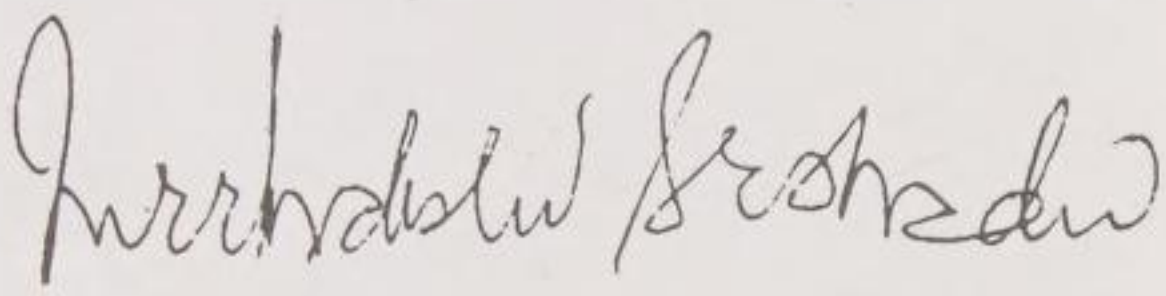
'The article is a clear indicator that I had a lot of growing up to do. I've said a lot of things that are not relevant and clearly contradictory. I've said that Sridevi looks South Indian, while I look like a Russian. In the next breath, I say I look very Indian. The bottom line is that I'm shooting my mouth off — saying things for the sake of it. The contradiction persists with Dimple Kapadia as well. I've said childish things like our relationship is tit for tat. What a strange thing to say, for I am hardly the fighting kind. I prefer to internalise feelings than articulate them. There is a false ring to the article. It reflects a phase — the state of mind I'm in, where I'm trying to shirk off diplomacy and

develop a new image. It's a syndrome of not really knowing who you are and why! I think the conflict is the heavy duty that comes along with stardom. The only way I can explain the kneejerk reaction, is that I was tired of the media labelling me an ice maiden. My answers are a combination of many complexes. The need to be attractive in print... The need for an image. But the quotes are a heavy price to pay, for I don't identify with them.

Perhaps, I was looking for a meeting ground with my colleagues. It was silly because friendship within the profession isn't possible. Jackie and I started out together, but the last time I met Jackie was when his first child was born. Strange as this sounds, I feel a greater bond with the press rather than my colleagues perhaps because they have been more in touch with my work and life. My colleagues know as much about me as I know about them, which is very little.'



(Meenakshi Seshadri)

1987

RAJESH KHANNA

'Rajesh and I are good friends.' — Anju Mahendru (July '87).

'He is the father of my children and a very integral part of my life. He can never be unimportant.' — Dimple (July '87).

'After every quarrel, he would inundate me with gifts as if he was courting me all over again.' — Tina Munim (August '87).

Three beautiful women. Three controversial relationships.

Three complex chapters in Khanna's life. What is it about Rajesh Khanna, that women who loved and lost him cannot be indifferent to the memory? Why is it that they drag their pasts into the present and discuss him when he's no more a part of their life? We decided to question the women. Persuading them to talk wasn't easy. If Anju Mahendru was unsure, Dimple was hesitant and Tina tight-lipped. 'I'm not sure if it's right to discuss him,' said Anju, sitting in her plush bungalow in Juhu and swallowing an aspirin to recover from a throbbing headache. 'It's a controversial subject...' remarked Dimple in between shots during a late night shooting of a Rajkumar Kohli film. 'What can I say? Anyway, how will it help...?' asked a reticent Tina when I contacted her over the phone one Sunday.

I spend long hours with the three women before they were willing to journey into their past and tell a strange story of half-forgotten truths. We flip back the pages of this still-open book to understand the mystique of a man called Rajesh Khanna...

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Anju Mahendru: Just one month after Rajesh Khanna left her to marry Dimple Kapadia, Anju called up the 'Naaz' theatre to check his box-office popularity. This, for a man who led his *baraat* past her bungalow, only to spite her. Still, erasing his memory is not as easy for Anju. His perverseness was the other side of his generosity. His cruel moods alternated with his gentle nature. Anju was bohemian and sharptongued, a contrast to the diplomatic Khanna. Then

what made R.K., the conservative raised in a traditional household, fall in love with the bold, independent model-cum-aspiring actress? The differences resulted in conflicts. Taking it as a challenge, R.K. sought to change his girlfriend. Today says Anju:

'Basically he is a very orthodox man, yet somehow he always gets attracted to ultra modern girls. I know it's a contradiction, but then Rajesh Khanna is like that. Confusion was a part of our relationship. If I wore a skirt, he'd snap, why don't you wear a saree? If I wore a saree, he'd wrinkle his nose and say, why are you trying to project a *Bhartiya nari* look? Things became worse when stardom found Rajesh Khanna. The champagne-and-roses affair was threatened by the very popularity and success the two had dreamt of. Rajesh Khanna, the heart throb of millions, never got encouragement from the person he most needed — Anju. Unsure of himself, he'd watch the rushes of his films with her, waiting for praise and appreciation. It never came. Instead, criticism was all he got. Anju refused to become another Khanna sycophant. She refused to see him in any other light than how she had always known him.

Says Khanna now, 'I didn't expect praise. All I wanted was a nod of approval... A gesture that reassured. But she was always ruthlessly critical. 'I was critical because that's how I am,' explains Anju. 'If he was bad, I always said so. Why should I have praised him just to keep him happy? There were plenty around to boost his ego. He has always been sensitive to criticism and I've always been very frank.'

Rajesh was going through the teething troubles of nouveau success. Anju, as the woman in his life, found herself at sea, coping with him. She was defensive. When Rajesh got back from a shooting schedule, he'd get frantic if Anju wasn't in the beautiful bungalow he had gifted her. He would call up all her friends to trace her whereabouts. He'd follow her everywhere. 'If I went somewhere, he'd trail me and ring me up consistently,' reveals Anju. 'The world was after me and I was after her,' says the ex-superstar bitterly today.' In retrospect, Rajesh sums up his relationship with Anju as one of unequals. 'I married Dimple on the rebound and Tina was a balm on the wounds inflicted by Dimple.'

Today, 17 years after the unpleasant break up of their seven

year live-in- relationship, Anju would rather be friends with Rajesh Khanna, than nurse old grievances. The two have struck a special relationship that only years of knowing each other can bring about. Whether it's sharing a drink or teasing each other about their current dates, there is an easy camaraderie. Anju and Rajesh have come a long way. Says an embarrassed Anju, 'When we spoke to each other for the first time after almost 17 years, I admit that both of us felt a bit awkward. I didn't call him Jatin as I used to in the past and he didn't call me Nikki. I didn't call him Kaka either. It would have been too *filmi!*'

Dimple Kapadia: When Dimple came into Rajesh Khanna's life, little did she know that she would have to bear the brunt of the casualties in his first affair. The young teen star was swept off her feet when the charming Khanna dramatically threw Rishi Kapoor's ring into the sea and proposed marriage. From childhood she was roughly jerked into adulthood. The marriage went wrong from the very beginning. Ironically, Dimple's complaints against Rajesh were similar to Rajesh's complaints against Anju. 'Everywhere I went, I was told that I was the most gorgeous woman in the world. But I never got a word of praise from him. It was as if he hadn't noticed me.'

Vulnerable and eager for reaction, Dimple was so awestruck by her superstar husband, that she was totally subjugated and robbed of the confidence to behave in a natural manner. She wore what he liked — sarees, and mixed with the people he approved of — his *chamchas*. It was always his approval that mattered. Says Dimple, 'I was always waiting for some reaction, but it never came. All my energy was spent in doing what he wanted and anticipating his approval. It was like climbing a ladder. No matter how fast I climbed, he was still many rungs ahead.'

Things became worse, when Rajesh Khanna's films started flopping. He became more rigid and withdrew into his shell. If Anju couldn't cope with his success, Dimple couldn't cope with his failure. 'He shared neither his happiness nor his sorrow, and I was too frightened of giving him any kind of support. All I could do was wait in attendance just in case he needed me.' Maybe it's got something to do with the man that makes women involved with him feel insecure. Maybe in their insecurity, Khanna seeks his security. During

her marriage, Dimple's self-esteem was low. Rajesh Khanna was a strong force to contend with. The truth was that the two married each other for all the wrong reasons. They failed each other in every way. And separation was the only way out.

Today, distance has brought about mutual understanding between the two. When a colleague recently remarked that Dimple had a volatile temper, her separated husband was the first one to defend her. 'I've been told that Dimple uses foul language when she's in a bad mood. I've never experienced this side of her. She is always ladylike and polite when we were together. She was and is a good mother to her daughters. I must give her full marks for that.'

On her part, Dimple acknowledges that Khanna has been a formidable influence on her life. The impressions he has left behind cannot be wiped away. Today, if Dimple remembers the trauma of living in 'Aashirwad', she cannot forget the tenderness, either. 'When he wants to charm you, he always succeeds. He is very generous — both with his purse and his heart. Anyone who comes into close contact with him will vouch for this.' Life with Rajesh Khanna had its highs and lows. When *Saagar* was released two years ago, Dimple said, 'I would have loved to have someone to share *Saagar* with. On second thoughts, if Mr. Khanna had been around, there would probably be no *Saagar* ! He would never have allowed me to act in films. But when my first film flopped, I did miss Kaka.'

Tina Munim: When Rajesh met Tina Munim, the wonder child and the youngest member of Munim family, the attraction between the two was mutual. Both were recovering from broken relationships and had a lot to give and take from each other. It was during the making of *Souten* in 1981, that the industry witnessed one of the most controversial liaisons blossom. Trusting him wholeheartedly, Tina took the bold step of moving into 'Aashirwad' for a brief time and later into their love nest, 'Abhishek'. Tina was far better equipped to handle Khanna's idiosyncrasies than the other two. Besides, time had mellowed the man drastically.

The possessive husband who would not allow Dimple to wear anything but sarees, now let Tina wear whatever she

chose. He pampered her extravagantly. He indulged her by decorating the interiors of 'Abhishek' in lavish white marble for a sum that was unheard of. He saw Tina as a professional actress and an independent and mature woman, and loved her for it.

If Anju was his idol and Dimple, someone he took for granted, Tina was Rajesh's equal. Says Khanna: 'Our relationship is based on honesty and we are being honest about it to the whole world. We are not ashamed of our love for each other. So we don't feel the need to hide it,' he said in January '83 when the Rajesh-Tina affair was riding the crest of romance. Three years later, the heat of romance hadn't subsided. 'Tina walked into my nightmarish life with all her warmth and love. Till then, I didn't know what happiness meant,' confessed Rajesh in a heart-to-heart interview.

But something was missing. The relationship obviously lacked something meaningful. Tina walked out on Rajesh Khanna and befriended Anil Ambani. Today, she doesn't want to talk about it. She is too proud to lament her problems to the press. She's proud to make up with her ex-flame. All she will say is, 'I was always the special one. I still am. He made me feel special.'

It's true that Rajesh has a special fondness for Tina. The other women accept this. They feel that out of the three, Khanna loved, probably still loves Tina the most. Why the two didn't make their relationship permanent and why they broke up their affair is something only they can answer. 'He wanted to marry me. But he took his time.' Tina said in an out-of-character interview to a film monthly. Those were days of communicating via the media. Said Khanna, 'If I open my mouth, a volcano will erupt. Dignity lies in my silence. I've never spoken about any of my women and I will not do so now.' To this, Tina retaliated. 'It happened... and it's unfortunate. I didn't mean to hurt him or anyone.'

Surprisingly, for all their personal upheavals, Anju, Dimple and Tina's lives continue to remain connected with him in some form or the other. What do his women expect from him? It's almost as if they have separated the man into three identities — the friend, the husband and the lover. Anju wants companionship. She is always there in times of need to

give him her shoulder to cry on. Dimple seeks responsibility and security for her children. And Tina wants pleasant memories. It's obvious that they still care for him. They regale with stories of his bewitching charm... His unmatched style... His bouts of incomparable generosity... And his tenderness and warmth. 'He wants to be the protector, but he needs to be protected himself,' analyses Dimple. In the end, Khanna sums up the three women in his own words. 'Dimple was the most vulnerable, Anju, the strongest and Tina, the leashless horse only I could handle.'

The ideal situation would be if Rajesh Khanna returns to Dimple. It would save a traumatic future for his two daughters. But now that Dimple is a successful star in her own right, can she fit into the old pattern? 'I don't know what the future holds. I've stopped thinking. I live for the moment,' says Dimple.

Should Khanna patch up with Anju? If he did it would be a fairy tale where everything turns right in the end, good begets good and evil begets evil. Anju would get Khanna back after being dramatically jilted by him 17 years ago. A future to discuss past follies. But do Anju and Rajesh share the vibes they once did? A marriage without passion and fire can be stable, but nothing is worse than trying to rekindle the ashes of a dead passion. 'I am not looking for any future with him. The relationship is beautiful as it is,' says Anju.

And finally Tina 'Right now I'm not ready to take any decisions, either personal or professional. I need a break,' sighs Tina. The billion dollar question is — who will be the woman in Rajesh Khanna's life? The only two women who seem to be confident of sharing his future are his two daughters — Twinkle and Chinky.

Sitting in his air-conditioned office at 'Aashirwaad', the kids are visiting their father for the *Ganapati pooja*. While the *pujari* chants the *mantras*, the two continue to chatter with Papa. 'Papa, am I intelligent? Do I talk sense?' asks Chinky. Rajesh bestows compliments on them alternately, in-between telling tales that fill them with delight. 'What fun we had in Nairobi,' remarks Twinkle. 'Give me two years and I'll bring Mama and Papa together,' says the older one. 'That will be wonderful but difficult,' says the younger one with

wisdom beyond her age. The options are many. But he's undecided. Perhaps Rajesh Khanna likes it that way!

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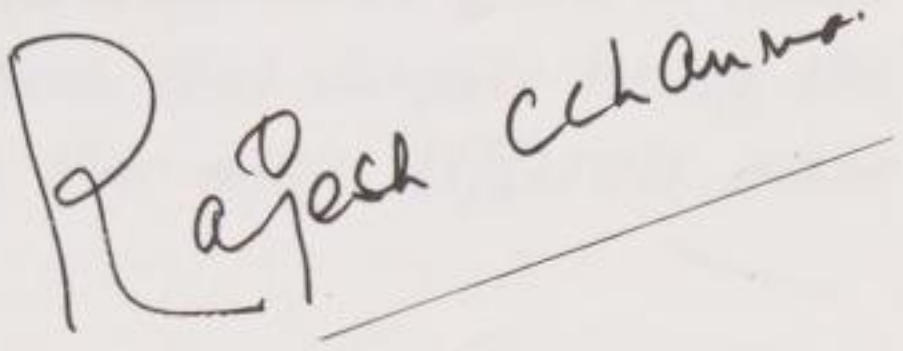
'I said yesterday, what I felt yesterday. I will say tomorrow what I feel tomorrow. And if what I said yesterday contradicts what I feel today, blame it on the heart. The heart has its own reasons.'



(Rajesh Khanna)

1989

JACKIE SHROFF

Even when he smiles, the frown does not leave his face. His temples throb so severely that watching him, one is afraid that he will burst a vessel any moment. Try chatting with him and you will not get beyond monosyllables. Consistently reserved, unconsciously preoccupied, Jackie Shroff's mind is a house of complexities that nobody can journey into.

Different people use different epithets to describe him - an outrageous flirt, unusually reserved, hypersensitive, high-strung. Is Jackie Shroff really as complicated as he is made out to be? What is it about him that despite being the easiest, somehow makes him the most difficult actor amongst the new breed?

Dangerously impulsive. Devastatingly good-looking. His colleagues acknowledge his generosity. His friends swear by his loyalty. But acknowledge that he is unpredictable.

And that's Jackie's magic. And also his weakness. Could it be that Jackie is attractive because of his complexities? In a typical Linda Goodman way, I tried putting the man together — as a son, as a husband, as an employer, and as a friend. A collage of impressions followed and in the end, one could only say, 'Oh, you heart-breaker!'.

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As A Son; Hoornissa Begum (mother): As a child he hated non-vegetarian food. Whenever we cooked meat at home, he would not eat with us. He would run away from the kitchen, run away from me. Hours later, when the kitchen had been cleared, and there was no trace of smell left in the air, he would return. Quietly, he'd sit in a corner, doing nothing. It was difficult to read his mind. He was always secretive and I could never make out what went on in his head. Over the years, of course, he has changed. Today, he's more approachable and eats meat too. I often wonder why he was such a mysterious child. Once, when he was six-years-old, I asked him why he did not like meat but he had no answer. He just shrugged his shoulders. From the very beginning, he never confided in anybody or complained about anything. Till he was about seven-years-old, he was all the time tied to my apron strings. He would follow me everywhere... He would trail behind me, holding my saree

pallu, playing with it, making a ball of the edge and putting it in his mouth. He didn't talk much... rather, not at all. He hero-worshipped his brother and would do anything for him. He was a weak child. Thin, undernourised and over-protected by his brother and friends. At school too, he was reserved. His teachers found him too shy to communicate with. They'd often write remarks in his calender, but nothing serious enough to cause me anxiety. I knew he wouldn't make a career of his education. He began losing interest in studies very early.

I think he became very good looking only when he stepped into his teens. It may sound boastful coming from his mother, but it's a fact, that I used to get tired of everyone telling me how handsome my son looked. Yet, never in my wildest dreams did I ever fantasise a film career for him. His father and I never interfered in his future plans. He was so shy that if he ever made a contact, or a new friend, we were only too relieved. We wanted him to feel free and speak out what was in his heart. After the demise of his elder brother Hemant, Jackie retreated into a shell. And as he grew older, his silence became more and more mysterious, so much so that it used to frighten me. Sometimes, when I sensed him to be in the right mood, when he was resting with his head on my lap, I'd try and probe. 'What are you thinking?' I'd ask him, but always he had the same answer. 'Nothing,' he'd say and then close his eyes and go to sleep. It's habitual for him to suffer all alone. I don't know how much of his thoughts he shares with his friends and wife. May be they know him better.

Thankfully over the years he has acquired many friends. A lot of them are very nice people and call me 'mummy'. I am sure they are rowdy and do *dhamal-masti* outside, but in my presence they are extremely well-behaved. My son has always been a vagabond. When we lived in our Teenbati house, he never came home before midnight. After marriage, he has mellowed considerably. Of course, he still has an awful temper. When he is angry, he is unbearable like a *tikha mirchi* you've unknowingly popped into your mouth. But he was like this even as a child. He'd sulk for days without telling me his cause for worry and suddenly, when I least expected it, he'd throw a tantrum, howl and say, 'But you hit me five days ago. Why did you?' On the other hand, he

can also be very impulsive and say what's on his mind, without mincing words. Recently, he had bought a beautiful *mangalsutra*. I saw the box, opened it and said, 'Wow! It's lovely. Is this for me?' He said, 'No it's for Ayesha. Why should I give you a *mangalsutra*? Ask your husband to give you one. He said it in a very matter-of-fact tone, without meaning to hurt, but I was hurt.

The trouble with Jaggu is that he's so affectionate and warm that the slightest harsh tone is painful for someone who loves him. He is a man of extreme temper, he snaps and when he is affectionate he goes out of his way to show it. Not because I am his mother, but he has no negative traits. You may check that out with anybody. They could be his friends or his foes but nobody hates Jackie. He keeps people at a distance, but nobody wishes him ill. Of that I am confident. My son does not talk against anybody. In fact, his problem is that he does not talk at all. The only way he expresses himself is by yelling! When he yells, the whole house trembles. Especially the servants. At the same time, he's very soft-hearted. He cannot bear to see suffering, especially poverty and illness.

Jackie is over-generous with his money. Mind you, I am not against charity but where he can part with a five rupee note, he gives 100 rupees. It's not in his nature to save money. But then he has always been like that. He was a spendthrift even when he wasn't a star. If he had Rs. 20 in his pocket, he'd blow up all 20 without a thought about tomorrow. Thankfully, Ayesha is sensible about money and takes care of my son and his wealth. If his father or I have to voice even the most ordinary complaint, like say, the light switch not being close to the bed, he'd get hysterical. He wants his parents to have all the conveniences, but if we were to even mention his thoughtfulness he would get very embarrassed. The sad thing is that after he has become busy, we don't get to see him as much as we used to. But even now when he is free, he sits here on my bed and we watch films together. I love watching his films but not where he is dying or is subjected to suffering. Recently when he had a day off, we watched *Hero* and *Kaash*. Did you know that Jackie weeps watching his own films? And I cannot bear to see my son weeping.

Kakubhai Shroff (father): Do I know my son well enough to

talk about him? Do parents know their children sufficiently? Jackie was unsually shy as a child, and I felt hesitant to communicate with him. Even my elder son, who Jackie admired greatly, did not converse much. Theirs was an intimate but quiet kind of relationship. Only my wife could break the ice with my son. Only she understood what went on in his head. I'd say he began opening up only after he joined the travel agency, 'Trade Wings'. It was his first job and it did great things to his personality. Later, I got to know that he was interested in modelling. We never discussed his future. He did what he wanted to. We were always there if he needed our help, support or advice.

One day his mother told me about the films offers he had received. First, Dev Anand and later Subhash Ghai showed interest in my son, which meant that there had to be something in him, for both were prominent film-makers. I didn't think of my son as someone extraordinary. As an astrologer, I had forecast his future through his horoscope. His stars were favourable and fame was inevitable. Contrary to the general belief, astrology isn't about answering questions. Astrologers aren't Gods. What has to happen will happen. Nobody, but the super power can change destiny. Only he, the Almighty, is the *trikaal gyani*.

Jackie's mission changed once he met Subhash Ghai. His meeting with Ghai may be called destiny, but what followed was a result of Jackie's own charisma and confidence. The total impact his personality created on people he worked with. That's life! Jackie has chosen his own career — good or bad and he is responsible for it. He didn't ask me to help him settle down in life. Just like I didn't approach my father to settle me in my life. We don't have much in common. If he had joined me in my line of work, we would have a lot more in common. But the way things stand, we are strangers.

I practise non-interference, especially when I am ignorant of the subject. I cannot advice Jackie on dates and films because I know nothing about the media. I only understand the celestial stars and when the need arises, I give my opinion. It's true that I had predicted stardom for him after his first film *Hero*. But then one predicts and prays for so many events. Everything does not come true. I've always told Jackie that whatever happens, does not happen

singularly. It's an accumulation of many events... A continuation of what has happened in the past and what is to unfold in the future.

Jackie, like me, does not ask too many questions. He is a man of few words. He is my son, but I am not sure if it is right for me to pass judgements on him. It will not be fair. How can anybody judge another person? And can relationships be so easily explained? I must say that he makes a good impression on people. I'd say he is a perfect gentleman. He is concerned about human relationships. He respects people, their emotions, even though most of his relationships are soundless, often mute. As I explained, we don't communicate much and I don't miss it either. We live under the same roof, but lead different lives. I don't inquire about his day-to-day affairs. He does not suffer. Well, I hope not. I can see that he is managing well. And for me that's enough. We never come to know if he is upset. If I am upset, I absorb my worries. I don't protest. And that's how it should be. The world cannot be same everywhere.

I am fortunate to have a son who is decent, who means well. I can see that he is well-behaved, refined, generous and caring. He is broad-minded, can view situations objectively, if not accept them as easily. Does he have any negative traits? Not to my knowledge. I've been told, rather I've heard it being discussed in the house, that he has a bad temper. I've never witnessed it. He has never raised his voice before me. I can only comment on what I see. And I see that marriage has domesticated him. At heart, Jackie is an artiste. And all artistes are ultimately very lonely.

As An Employer; Vimla (Housemaid): *Saab* and everyone at home call me Vimli. The women of this house, including us servants, are overprotected by *saab*. The ground rule of this house is that none of us are allowed to step out after 7 p.m. *Saab* is very, very particular about this. Nothing makes him as mad as any of us violating the curfew rule. Once I had gone to attend my friend's marriage and I had told *memsaab* that I'd be back before 7 p.m. I got held up by the traffic and by the time I got back, to my bad luck, *saab* had returned from work. He was, would you believe, in the kitchen, cooking dinner all by himself! I rushed to help him, tried taking the rolling-pin from his hand, but he wouldn't let me. Forget talking to me, *saab* even refused to look at

me! I felt miserable. For a while, I thought he was angry with me because the dinner wasn't ready, but that wasn't so. He was angry because I'd broken the rule. I was late after promising to be home on time. He did not speak to me for four days, which is very uncharacteristic of *saab*. Normally it's his habit to erupt like a volcano and then calm down just as quickly. On the fifth day, I couldn't bear his silence any more. I went to him and held my ears in apology. Then finally he relented.

We know that film magazines write all kinds of nasty things about him, but he treats us like daughters of the house, always addresses us as *bachche*, or *bete*, he encourages us to save our salaries in banks and shows deep concern about what's happening in our homes. A few months ago, *saab* was going to Panvel for an outdoor shooting. I casually told him that my parents' house is on the way. He asked me the whereabouts, I explained the address, which I don't think he understood. I never expected him to visit our house, for he may be very kind and nice to me, but after all he is a star. Besides, it's only natural that he would be busy. But *saab* actually went to my house and predictably all hell broke loose when he knocked at our door. It was early morning and everyone was sleeping. As soon as they saw him, someone ran for his *lungi*, somebody to pick up the mattresses, while somebody else made him a *sherbat*. When he returned from the shooting, he told *memsaab 'Baki sab baad me, sabse pehle* Vimli *ke ghar pe pankha lagao!'* He sent a ceiling fan for my parents the same month. Can you believe my parents' joy? My mother was so touched that she blesses him every day. 'What none of my children could do, he did for us. Now our old age will pass in comfort.'

I was deeply moved myself. One wants to do so much for one's parents and despite having such a good job, one has priorities. Let's face it, a lot of people in this world are rich. But very few have a big heart. I often wonder why some people are so good. The nicest thing about both *saab* and *memsaab* is that they talk nicely to their staff. They are not high-handed and rude. Money is not all that one works for. Whenever a dish is cooked well, they make it a point, to praise me and shower compliments. Once when *saab* had gone to Pune, he ate *varan bhaat* at some place. The next day, he asked me to cook the same for him and when I did,

he was very surprised, '*Arre*, Vimli how did you know I wanted exactly this?' At parties too, he eats something and asks *memsaab* to remember the recipe so that we can cook the same at home. He likes simple food to be served without fanfare. He has peculiar eating habits. He does not like too much noise while he is eating and mostly eats from a bowl. *Saab* never sits at a dining table. He prefers to sit on the floor. He loves eating in the kitchen too and often plonks on a stool with his *thali* on the platform.

Narayan; (Houseboy): Not because he is our *saab*, but it's difficult to imagine that rich people are human too. If *saab* hears of our problems, he breaks down. His concern is real. In fact, if any of us is unwell, *saab* yells at *memsaab* for not taking care of us. A year ago, I was engaged to be married, but just a fortnight before my wedding, the girl I was to marry met with an serious accident and died on the spot. Both *saab* and *memsaab* were very upset. They came for the funeral too. Both were actively involved in my wedding preperation. *Memsaab* had all along been helping me. When the saree*wala* came home, she would force me to buy saree for my family and my bride to be. When I told her I didn't want them because I would use up all my money, she would pay for the saree herself. *Saab* and *memsaab* are always with us in our moments of sorrow. All of us know that we can depend on them.

Saab is a very easy man to work for, for the simple reason that his demands are very few. He does not like noise, he does not like shabbiness and he disapproves of disobedience. Besides the 7 p.m. deadline, he is particular that we do not ever ask for money, just when the *memsaab* is going out of the house. If money is required for shopping, it should be taken when *memsaab* is at home. In any case, it is a routine that *memsaab* checks what is to be purchased from the market. Once, while *memsaab* and *saab* were in the lift, I ran out of the kitchen to ask *memsaab* for the money. They were very angry. I felt bad because even though *saab* often loses his temper, *memsaab* is very calm. I felt so ashamed that I contemplated leaving my job. I had just begun packing my things, when *memsaab* entered the kitchen and said, 'Good morning, Narayan'. I could have wept out of joy. I apologised profusely and ever since, none of us ask her for money when she is going out.

As A Boyfriend/Husband; (Ayesha Shroff): He made a very jealous, very possessive boyfriend. Those days, if another boy was to glance at me, he was ready to bash up the guy. Our romance was very much of the Mills & Boon variety and at the same time very different. Initially, we were more of friends than lovers. Love came in gradually. Even today, we are friends first and then spouses. When you grow up with a person, you take his fears and anxieties in your stride. You get acquainted with his emotions and don't need to fear his moods. Over the years, I've learnt to accept him as he is, in all situations and circumstances. Earlier, when he looked upset, I used to get upset too. Today, when I sense he's brooding, I let him be. I don't probe or irritate him with questions. Similarly, today when he feels the need to be with his friends, I understand and give him the space. When I was younger, I did not understand. Then, any time spent away from me was immediately construed as negligence. Even during our worst fights I never felt insecure. Never did I believe that he'd marry someone else. I knew that whether he clicked or failed in films, I would be his wife!

If he was very chivalrous as a boyfriend, he is even more caring as a husband. There have not been any major changes in our relationship after marriage. I was very naive earlier. He has taught me to not accept people at face value. There are other influences too. One, Jackie is pretty old-fashioned and over the years I too have absorbed the same values. Two, being brought up in different environments, our life-styles, though often confused, have ultimately formed a harmonious pattern. For instance, when we started renovating our house, I thought it was perfectly normal to buy certain things on credit, but Jaggu is dead against it. He is very rigid, very traditional and will not buy anything he feels he cannot immediately afford. I respect his feelings and have over the years, become very much like him.

There are times when I hate him... When he throws his clothes all over the place and when his cupboards need cleaning up. Then I protest. People often ask me what Jaggu has that makes me love him so much. I don't know. Besides, in all these years, I have had no serious grievances against him. My anger is a mere pretence. I don't mean it. Just as I know that when he gets angry and throws tantrum, he does not mean it. Tears embarrass Jaggu. He doesn't like anyone

weeping. In fact, he gets so moved by tears that he gets irritated. But nothing moves him so deeply as a good performance. He accepts situations in his stride. It could be either failure or success.

After a fight, I'd love to sulk and moan but he doesn't allow me to. How quickly we make up depends entirely on me. If I am withdrawn and act hard to get, he becomes as mute as a stone. But no matter how serious our fights and how nasty we get with each other, when we sleep, we have to cuddle up. In the morning we may go back to sulking, but not at night. It's a promise we have made to each other. It is not like Jackie to discuss his problems. He suffers in solitude and over the years, I've learnt to accept him as he is. For that matter he is not very demonstrative. On special occasions, he never forgets to slip in a note here and there. That way he is quite a nice chap. His directors tell me that he's preoccupied all the time.

Jackie is a great administrator. He is also very, very house-proud. If there is even a small speck of dust somewhere, he gets irked. 'So this is how you keep the house, is it?' he says and I immediately feel terrible. But then that's his style. Once in a while, if any dish contains less salt or his tea is without the right amount of sugar, Jackie is sure to throw a barb. He is an expert cook himself and can even tell you the recipe by just tasting it. On his off-days, he often makes *sabzi* for the servants, his parents and me. We love whatever he cooks.

His mother dotes on him. With his father, he is more formal. Recently when papa was at the hospital, he was very upset. I had never seen him like this before. He was edgy, very anxious, yet he would not go to meet papa at the hospital. Hospitals scare him. Ever since the demise of Hemant*bhai*, any kind of illness upsets Jackie. After great persuasion, he went to meet papa but only once and that too, only for a few minutes. Yet, Jackie regularly called from wherever he was to inquire about his father. 'Has he taken his medicines? What does the doctor say? etc... ' He is like that. A man of strange habits. Take his inclination to travel light, for instance. Wherever he goes, he wants to take only one pair of jeans and three shirts. Now this irritates me. What is the point of buying so many clothes if you want to live like a gypsy. When he is going on an outdoor, I like to

pack his bag with two pairs of clothes per day but always, he carries with him the same jeans and two shirts. His mother is right, he is a vagabond who is learning to live in a mansion.

As A Friend; (Arvind Shah): Initially, I was Jackie's brother's friend. And Jackie being younger, we would make him do all odd jobs for us – like fetching the cricket ball, bringing a chair, or ordering cold drinks for the rest of the gang. Those days our family lived next door to the Shroffs and since Hemant and I were almost the same age, we soon got friendly. Then, our family shifted to Arthur Road, and my visits to Teenbati decreased. I'd come only on weekends. The day the accident took place was a Sunday. That is a tragedy none of us have gotten over. After the accident, somehow I couldn't get myself to come to Teenbati, and slowly without realising, my contact with the Shroffs severed completely.

Years passed by and when I next met Jackie, he was a grown up man and a very handsome one at that. This was in 1970. We were at a common friend's party and we spotted each other almost simultaneously. It was as if the intervening years did not exist. We picked up threads from that very moment and have been thick pals ever since. Our bond was common. Hemant. In me, Jackie looked for his elder brother he missed immensely. While in Jackie, I hunted for my dearest friend. Our attachment was both predictable and inevitable.

Those days Jackie was broke all the time. He got a meagre Rs. 30 as his monthly pocket money. Our group was forever going on picnics, to theatres and parties. But never was Jackie made to feel unwanted or inferior just because he did not have enough money in his pocket. We liked him, we enjoyed his company. Money was not given much importance. The group believed that whoever has the money, should spend it... Maybe that is why Jackie is so generous with his money today. And maybe that is why he gets so mad when people say derogatory things about our friendship with him. He gets damn mad when people call me his *chamcha*. Initially, it hurt a lot. How dare they have that kind of attitude? But then I felt, it does not matter. After all it isn't their fault. That's the only way press understands relationships. Since I am all the time with Jackie, there are occasions when I run odd errands for him... Like parking his

car or contacting somebody on the phone etc. What matters is how Jackie treats me. And Jackie has always introduced me to everybody as his elder brother.

Stardom hasn't affected Jackie. It has given him luxury, fame, but his heart is untouched. There is a magnetism about personality. Even when Jackie wasn't a star he had leadership qualities. He was the local hero and young friends followed whatever he did. He had a knack of complimenting scarves with shirts and somehow look very dashing. *Dhoti-kurta* was his favourite attire. He wore it for parties and God! how the girls swooned over him. He was a big hit even with little kids. At large gatherings, trust Jackie to be surrounded by children. He'd play with them and watch cartoon films.

He never gets impatient or yells at kids. That he does only with adults. We call him *aag ka gola. Uske temper se khuda bachaye*! Only once, in the 30 years I've known him, have we had a major fight. And it was over a very trivial matter. This was four years ago. Jackie, Ayesha and I were dining at Hotel President. When we had almost finished dinner, Jackie excused himself and went out of the room. Much later, when Jackie did not return, Ayesha asked, 'Where has he gone? To the loo or to shave?' I made a very casual humour quip (or so I thought), 'He has gone to call his other girl-friend,' I said. Perhaps, it was my intoxicated state that made me speak thus. That was enough. As soon as she heard this, Ayesha stormed out of the room in a huff. I thought she had left the hotel and gone home... When Jackie returned and asked about Ayesha, I hadn't a clue. It must have been past midnight and for half-an-hour, we looked for Ayesha everywhere but couldn't trace her. Jackie was mad at me for playing the fool with her. At about 1.30 a. m. we gave up and began driving home, our eyes all the time scanning the road for a taxi with a lonely woman. It was somewhere in Sachivalaya, that Jackie spotted Ayesha, weeping and walking all alone on the street. He stopped the car, pulled her by the arm and gave her a tight slap. The three of us drove back in total silence.

After this, Jackie wasn't interested in even talking to me. He held me responsible for the whole scene. We did not talk for one whole month and when we made up, we resolved never to fight again. But we did. And very soon. It was during the

shooting of *Hero*. Subhash Ghai, Jackie and I were driving home after a party. I was in the rear seat of the car. Jackie was beside me. Suddenly, in a fit, I don't know what happened to me but I caught hold of Jackie's throat and began choking him. Subhash*ji* stopped the car and came to help Jackie. Meanwhile Jackie, in his struggle to break free, gave me a punch on my face. It was a hard punch and I fell unconscious. Jackie took me to the hotel room and spent a sleepless night watching over me. He sat at my bedside, ready with a stick in hand (just in case I attacked him again) and a bucket of water in the other... It was a traumatic night for him.

After this accident, I went slow on my drinks on Subhash*ji*'s insistence. He made me understand that misbehaviour of this kind would, in the long run have an adverse effect on Jackie's career. Strange, but until then, this had never occurred to me. I was still in carefree world and lived life as if it was only fun and games. Never did Jackie, make me feel like a liability. This makes me feel very proud of our friendship.

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"Thank you for the trip down memory lane! All I can say is that the piece with all the members of my family is the nicest 'Feel Good' article I have read (About Myself!) in the 13 years of my career in this industry!!"

(Jackie Shroff)

1989

DIMPLE KAPADIA

Has Dimple Kapadia changed all that much? Recapping the decade gone by. A peep into the private diary of showbiz's most beautiful actress.

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1981; Dina Pathak's residence, Dadar: We are at the funeral of character actress Dina Pathak's husband, Baldev Pathak. The formalities over, all the women present, move to the adjoining room, while the man continue discussions outside. In the small group of women visitors, is Dimple Khanna (Rajesh and Baldev were very good friends). In a white organdi saree, her hair tied in a high bun, she looks prosperously overweight and domestic (with oily hair and a *mangalsutra*), yet beautiful!

As hours pass by, the mourning tension ceases, though not completely. To divert the attention of a grief-struck Dina*ji*, Dimple recounts her encounter at similar gatherings. 'When Kaka*ji*'s aunt expired, I was still new to the 'Aashirwad' lifestyle. Being the only woman in the house, I had to bathe her body and complete all formalities. Can you imagine being locked with a dead body in a bathroom...? Struggling to free her blouse-buttons and painting her with *chandan*. It was all so scary. I was weeping as I poured water over the body. I went through it... You always do, when responsibilities fall on you.' She says it all calmly. I'm meeting Dimple for the first time and I'm trying not to be judgemental. Present at this moment primarily as a proxy for her husband, Dimple is considerate, candid, brooding and flighty...

When Dina*ji* goes for her ritual bath, Dimple sits next to Shabana (the only actress present at the occasion) and asks, 'What kind of people come to Prithvi Theatre?' her brown eyes twinkling. 'The *kurta* and *Kolhapuri chappal* kind,' says Shabana. 'And where do jeans clad, swanky guys go to?' 'To swanky places I guess,' says Shabana. The crazy conversation continues in the car. Sitting next to the chauffeur, Dimple says, *'Hum* cigarette *pinewale hai aur saab ko bolega to shaamat ayegi. Samjhe?'* The driver looks embarrassed. As the car takes off, Dimple lets loose her auburn hair, and leans back to languorously light a cigarette. Blowing smoke rings in the air, she says, 'God! I was waiting to do this for a long time.'

1982; Aashirwad, Bandstand: Rajesh Khanna is going to Bangalore for an outdoor shooting and Dimple is accompanying her husband. When we reach their bunglow, the couple is all set to leave for the airport. We are here to confirm Khanna's appointment for a photosession and Khanna is, as always, being elusive. Dimple is getting ready with her last minutes details. She puts her hand luggage in the car, then leans against the bonnet, her expression, one of bewilderment. When her husband calls her, she walks towards us. 'Hello,' she greets me coyly, hiding behind her spectacled husband. Her eyes show no recognition. During the 20 minutes we spend at 'Aashirwad', she does not utter a word. So much so, that even when the watchman has to open the gates, Dimple looks at her husband as if awaiting instructions. Is this the same woman, I wonder?

There is one area however, where she is totally unguarded. Her kids. Just as she snuggles inside the car, younger daughter Chinky comes out of the house weeping... In a moment, Dimple storms out of the car and runs to pick the girl. The baby continues to cry, but when papa Khanna holds the little one's finger and takes her to the *ayah*, the sobbing stops. For a moment, there is hesitation, then swiftly Dimple runs behind the baby and the *ayah*. Dimple returns, sits in the car and rolls up her window.

Minutes later, our cars meet at the traffic lights and I notice that they are both looking out of their respective windows. I wonder what quality of relationship they share? Does Khanna realise the effect he has on his child-wife? Is he aware of Dimple's total and complete subservience to him? Like a chameleon, she changes colours.

1983; Samudra Mahal, Juhu: Dimple's first day of shooting for *Saagar*. In the drawing-room, four huge baskets of flowers await her. The message on each card is brief, but sincere. 'Best of luck - and may you be happy' says one. 'I have just a handful of friends and with their genuine support I'm certain I'll survive,' Dimple tells me when I meet her in the evening, on the sets. Her make-up man, Ram Tipnis, is giving the final touches to her face, while sister Simple who is playing her hair-dresser for the day, is busy brushing her mane, pinning her saree, looking for her sandals, and serving her carrot juice.

The first shot is simple. Dimple races down the staircase and Chintu coming from the opposite end bumbs into her. A long shot of the two, then a close-up and C-U-T! 'Were you nervous before you faced the camera?' I ask Dimple when she returns to the chair next to mine. She sighs, 'I'd been so worried about today's shooting. The last time I faced the camera was 10 years ago. Yet, half-an-hour ago when I actually stood before the camera and performed, acting seemed the easiest thing in the world. Those few moments were frenzied. But when I heard Ramesh*ji* shout 'Cut', I knew I was back.'

The prodigal had returned at last. In fact, it was difficult to believe that Dimple could have spent the last ten years of her life anywhere but in these studios. Dimple laughs, 'Javed Akhtar said the same thing when he came on the sets two hours ago. He said he'd expected me to be sitting in a corner, chewing my nails. Instead, by not being nervous I had disappointed him!' She laughs constantly. However, as the hours go by, and as the actress prepares before every shot, one can see, she's been out of touch. She says it will take some time before she keeps in step with her professional colleagues. 'I've to yet get used to my body movements, I've to yet learn to concentrate on continuity. Everytime I touch up my make-up, I'm conscious that the size of my *bindi* is changing. During the fourth shot, I suddenly realised that I wanted to wear a nose-ring, since I had not worn one in the previous shot, I couldn't. So sad!'

Her daughters, Twinkle and Chinky, are there too. Sitting in a distant corner they sip Thums Up. They are quiet, without communication. Temperamentally, they are the perfect star children — they understand the discipline of shooting. Probably, it is intuitive, but whenever a 'take' is on, they sit in pin-drop silence, watching their mother with utmost concentration, deeply engrossed in her every move. But no sooner does the director shout 'cut!', the two kids burst into giggles.

1984; Home: We are doing a feature with Anil Kapoor (in those days a struggler) where we make him visit his colleagues and shoot them questions. 'Why don't we go and meet Dimple?' Anil suggests and we barge into Dimple's house. It is a lazy afternoon and Dimple is at home, playing cards with Simple. This is the phase before the release of

Saagar. The phase of controversies, whether *Zakhmi Sher* or *Saagar* should be released first. 'If I had my say, I'd obviously prefer *Saagar*, but I know *Zakhmi Sher* will be released first. Tension has a deep bond with me. I've never got anything easily in life. My comeback will also be full of tension.' 'Rubbish,' snaps younger sister Simple. 'What about *Bobby*?' Marriage to superstar? Decisions - and all before you are 30!' Dimple blinks. Confused, she says, 'I really don't know what to say. It's too early. Let's wait and see what happens.' We are sitting in her garden outside. Munching Monaco biscuits, Dimple chuckles, 'Yesterday Javed Akhtar suggested we make a film with Khanna and me... I was quite excited. So what if I have left his house? We can work together, can't we? Do you think he'll agree?' There is silence, while everyone in embarrassment sip their tea. 'I loved Khanna, in his old films when he was intense, *Avishkaar*, *Safar*, even *Anand*. Of all his heroines, Mumtaz suited him the best. In fact, he should have married Mumu. She would have coped with him better than I did. The next evening, Dimple calls our office. 'Don't write anything I said. It was all of-the-record. I'll get into trouble, shooting off my mouth like this!'

She is going through a difficult phase and indecision is a part of it. Having walked out of her husband's house, she wants films to engulf her, but it's all taking a long time. A lot of controversies need to gather dust and in the meanwhile a lot of knots need to be untied... Back in her father's house, Dimple is going through her adjustment period. It isn't easy tearing off the mask she had so carefully worn while playing Mrs. Khanna, at 'Aashirwad'. Away from him, her man's influence on her is dissolving. Khanna is too arrogant to change his word. It's a different matter that he takes a long time to make decisions. And if possible, would stall them till the last minute. But once he did, it was his word of honour. With Dimple, this was the beginning of 'yes' means 'no' and 'no' means 'yes'.

1985; Satish Bhalla's Bungalow, Bandra: The film is *Insaaf*. The set, a swanky room, ostensibly her hero Vinod Khanna's bedroom. In a corner, the heroine of the film, Dimple sits learning her dialogues. She appears in a bad mood when she frowns and asks producer Nitin Manmohan, 'Where is Suresh Oberoi? And how long will I have to sit here waiting for him?' 'He is on the phone, ma'am. He should be here

any moment,' answers Nitin. 'Fine. When he comes, I will go to make my phone-call.' Then spotting me she says, 'So these days you interview young kids, is it?' Her tone is sarcastic, hinting at my chance meeting with her daughters at Khanna's office on the Ganesh Chaturti festival. Unused to unfair allegations, I shoot back with a sting in my voice, which surprise both of us. 'Your husband was present. He should have known what they spoke and why?' Just then Suresh Oberoi returns, apologising profusely. Within minutes, Dimple's defences break and the two go for their shot. When they return, she's a different person. Showing me the still photograph album, she says she is playing a double role in the film. 'Of a doctor and a dancer...' Then turning to me in all earnestness asks, 'Do you have any suggestions?' This is first time I'm meeting an actress who so openly asks for an opinion. Her sincerity is moving. There is something attractive about the actress. Here's someone you feel is worth taking a little trouble over. But you withdraw. The reason being her inconsistency — it makes you distrust her. Also, for someone reared on formal, old world values, Dimple's informal ways are unsettling. Even on the phone, she is extra casual, her opening line being, 'Haan bol'. She is approachable, accommodating, interesting, I agree, but her Bohemian ways and language kind of shy me away from her.

1986; Sunkist Bungalow, Bandra: The film is *Kaash*, and the scene the husband-wife confrontation. An hour before lunch-break, director Mahesh Bhatt discusses the scene. 'Throw it all out... Get rid of all your frustrations!' Mahesh says dramatically. Dimple nods, eyes blinking... One can see that the actress is getting ready for the scene. Succinct symptoms of isolation are obvious. When the shot begins, in her effort to give the best, she muffs up her lines... Retake follows retake and frustration builds up. Suddenly, without warning Dimple removes her *chappal* and starts hitting the table and abusing herself. No one is shocked. In Mahesh Bhatt's unit, neurotic behaviour is considered normal! Hours later, in the privacy of her make-up room, Dimple is cheerful. 'You should see the respect Hema Malini commands when she enters a set. Would anyone give us younger actresses such respect? Especially me, after the way I behaved today on the sets? I know it isn't good, but what can I do if my irritation gets the better of me? I wanted to do the scene so much better, but I muffed it up... Oof! I can't tell you how awful one feels mucking up an important scene!'

Months later at a preview of *Kaash*, everyone is full of praise for Dimple's performance. It is a role she has worked hard for and the praise is deserving. After seeing the film, I call her late in the night. 'She is playing Scrabble with Twinkle,' says Simple. Minutes later, Dimple comes on the line. Asks for feedback and when I give it to her, she takes it in her stride, hungry for more. Unlike many actresses I've known, Dimple takes criticism on her chin. She is a sport and when she errs, she isn't ashamed to say 'sorry'. *Kaash*, for me, is a continuation of the director's earlier film *Arth*. Both these films came at a very crucial time in the actress' career. If after *Arth*, Shabana became the champion of women's rights, Dimple benefited in two ways after *Kaash*. One, she was taken seriously as an actress. Two, suddenly a sympathy wave began for Dimple.

1988; Seth Studios: It is 10.00 p.m on the sets of *Mera Shikaar* and Dimple has been shooting non-stop since morning. 'Not even a lunch break,' she says yawning. 'I'm so tired...' She continues, her eyelids drooping. She looks it. 'I feel I can fall asleep sitting on this very sofa, without bothering about either my make-up or hair.' Even her staff looks over-worked. 'All of them are ill. It has been a strenuous month... poor things. I feel sorry for them.' That is why today, Dimple has let her staff leave early even though she is still shooting. 'Will someone please give me some tea?' she yells. A unit boy does. Another, walking close behind his heels, says, 'Ma'am the shot is ready!' 'So boring,' she says, then moves reluctantly to pick-up the mirror. 'God, I look like a ghost,' she sighs. She fidgets with her hair, trying in vain to tidy her long tresses. 'I don't know to make plaits. I don't know how I'm going to do it without my hairdresser.'

Grudgingly, she applies lipstick, yawning in between. 'Will someone give me another cup of tea, please, I feel I am going to faint any moment.' A boy runs to get it, but there's no time because the shot is ready. From the make-up room to the sets is a long walk. 'I am dying,' she tells her producer. 'Can't we shoot tomorrow?' There is no response. The producer moves away as if he has not heard her. Dimple knows that she has no choice. To nobody in particular she says, 'No matter what happens I am going home at 11 o'clock.' She is overworked, irritable and therefore melancholic. 'This film world is a jungle, you work so hard

and in the end, you go through the insecurity of numbers. I've not had time to see my daughters and I'm feeling miserable! But they are coming home, because chicken pox virus has stuck the school. They will be with me for a few days and I'm looking forward to it.'

A week later. Muzzafar Ali's house there is a launch party for *Zooni*, his new film. Khayyam's music and Shabana's voice from *Anjuman* greet you as you enter the low gates of his artistic bungalow. The hero (at that time Raj Babbar) has arrived and everyone is now waiting for Dimple. In a light blue silk saree with silver jewellery, she makes a solo entry. She looks so stunning that there is pin-drop silence in the hall, as everyone turns to look at her. She stands at the entrance hesitant, undecided. In the huge crowd, a smile welcomes her and she follows it unthinking.

'You are looking beautiful,' I tell her. In a second, her confidence is re-established. Her drooping shoulders straighten, her eyes shine and the smile returns to her face. 'Thank you,' she says. 'I was feeling all weepy inside. Chinky, my younger one, didn't want me to come to the party. I feel awful disappointing her... Besides, I'm not used to this arty crowd. I don't know what is expected of me.' I'm puzzled. Can a woman as beautiful as Dimple really be unsure of her appearance? Does she really need reassurance? 'Ever since I can remember, everyone, everywhere I went told me I was gorgeous. But Khanna, as long as I was with him, never ever said so even once. So till today, I'm not sure if I'm really as good looking as people make me out to be. There are times I look into the mirror and like what I see... Like yesterday, because I had done elaborate make-up for a scene. I felt I had good eyes. But today, I couldn't even bear to look into the mirror!'

1989; Shashilal Nair's set, Versova: We have an appointment for an early morning session. But just as our car enters the set, Dimple's man-in-waiting, Laxman stops us, 'Madam will not be able to make it. She is unwell and is resting at home. If you want, you can come home and talk to her...' We do. In the living room, the Kapadia house buzzes with the daily routine — trays of tea, phone-calls, servants asking about some pending bills. Dimple is there too — she looks more worn out than unwell. More preoccupied than tired. To questions we ask her, she replies in monosyllables. Chunibhai

Kapadia, her father, who was recently hospitalised for paralysis, is in the room and talking about his medical reports. Reem, her kid sister is reading the newspaper. Simple is discussing a costume Dimple requires for the shooting tomorrow. Frowning, Dimple nods to everyone. 'I am so sleepy. I wish I could sleep for nine hours undisturbed... Sometimes I think I'm going to run away from all this...' She looks like she is going to break down any moment. She doesn't. She's a strange bundle of contradictions. Her moods change in a jiffy. A while ago, she looked she was going to burst into tears. Just now, watching her servant trip on the carpet, she bursts into giggles, *'Dekh ke nahin chal sakte kya? Abhi hadi pasli ek ho jaati?'*

In the evening, her preoccupation returns. 'These days I getting on my own nerves. Thinking too much is a curse. I wonder what I brood over so much? It's unhealthy.' *'Shauk hai na apko* tension *ka?'* Simple taunts her. Dimple sulks. 'I'm worrying about a film I don't want to do, but don't know how to get out of. My heart says it's a wrong decision, but I don't have the courage to say 'no', and if I say 'yes', I will burn out all through the making...' The pressure is telling on her. The comparisons with Sridevi, the burden of bearing the mantle of No. 2. The pressures at home, pressures of love... Of responsibilties. It's a phase of low self-esteem. Of depression and lack of ambition. 'The truth is I don't know what I want...'

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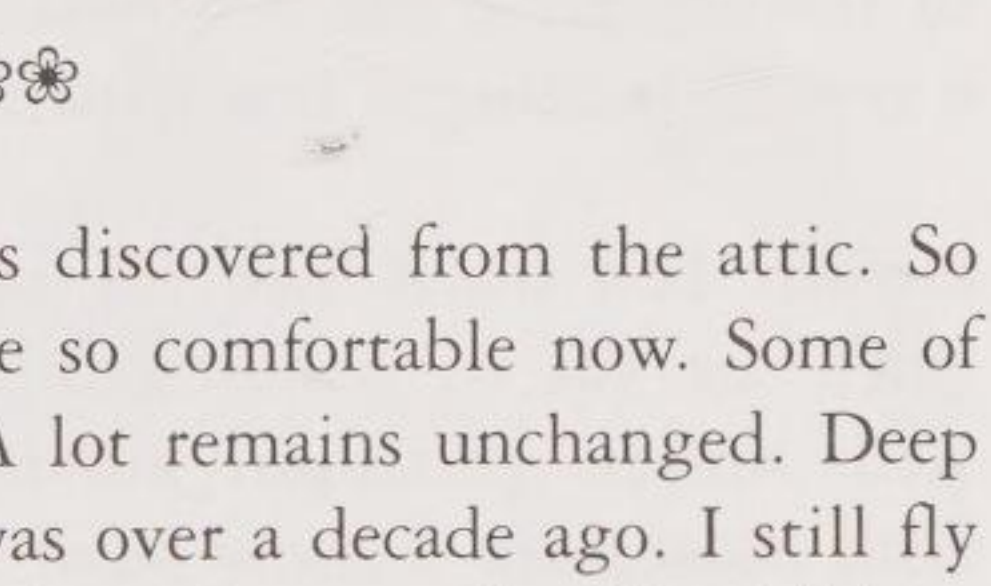
'It felt as if an old trunk was discovered from the attic. So many memories — not all are so comfortable now. Some of them hurt, some embarrass. A lot remains unchanged. Deep down, I'm still the person I was over a decade ago. I still fly off the handle, worry excessively and cry easily. My children have grown up and control my life for me now.'



(Dimple Kapadia)

The 90's were full of surprises.

- Kimi Katkar, the emerging sex symbol of showbiz had decided to quit films and got married to ace-photographer, Shantanu Sheorey. She had stopped giving interviews and it was a challenge making Sheorey discuss their marriage. He was forthcoming and confessed that what attracted him to Kimi was her honesty.
- Rekha's late husband, Mukesh Agarwal had died under mysterious circumstances and the press had been hounding the actress. When the pressures became too many, Rekha decided that however painful, she'd have to give her version. She did, with dignity and pride.
- Rishi Kapoor was unable to decide whether he should switch to character roles or weild the megaphone. His interviews had begun to sound like a long playing record of unending career conflicts. For fresh insights, I interviewed his wife Neetu Singh, who analysed her husband's eccentricities. When the interview appeared in print, he denied being as difficult as he was made out to be.
- Aamir Khan and Pooja Bhatt, the hot pair of *Dil Hain Ke Maanta Nahin,* had been denying media link-ups. All I did was to reproduce their interaction during the course of our photosession with them. The chemistry was unbelievable!
- Anupam Kher provoked by a hostile story, slapped a journalist and it turned into a major scandal. Condemned universally for the premeditated act, the actor refused to apologise or feel guilty. Alienated and anguished, it was a low phase for the actor.
- Equally turbulent time was for Saif Khan and Amrita Singh, madly in love but frightened to say so. They deliberately misled the media inquiring about their marriage, and all hell broke loose when a week later, their *nikkahnama* leaked into the press. To their credit it must be said that they bravely admitted to their foolishness and second time round, told no lies.
- Sridevi was ruling the roost for over a decade. The first tremor came with *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* and her interview in the wake of *Gumrah* was indicative of the shifting equations.
- My conversations with Aamir Khan conducted on our drive to Manmohan Desai's funeral and Anupam Kher in a suburban farm house, after the slap controversy were full of insights.

- South whiz-kid Mani Ratnam was put up at Centaur Hotel, Juhu, by A B Corp., distributors for the bi-lingual *Bombay*. Programmed to give interviews by the film's PRO all day, when it was my turn to drop by at the hotel, a drained Ratnam staring at the sun setting into the sea said, 'I have never spoken so much in my entire life.'
- Salman Khan was not talking to the press for a long time, but in a surprise gesture agreed to meet me. It proved to be the most enchanting encounter and I recall the magical afternoon after all these years with fondness.
- It was a decade of revelations. Meenakshi Seshadri got married. Nana Patekar emerged as the new sex-symbol even though I found him exceedingly diffident, admitting to talking to the walls. Tabu was the neo-realistic actress, but lacking in self-esteem. To a certain extent, so was Madhuri Dixit, facing an identical crisis that Sridevi underwent early in the decade. Only Anil Kapoor, Kamal Haasan and Ram Gopal Varma sounded upbeat and optimistic about their current projects.
- The senior stars were back with a vengeance. Sharmila Tagore in a one-woman show *Aparajita* in Bengali. Jaya Bachchan after an 18-year break in *Hazar Chaurasi Ki Maa.* Kiron Kher in *Darmiyaan* after packing up her stage career over a decade ago and Deepa Mehta, the director from Toronto having the country in flames with her controversial film *Fire*.

1990

SHANTANU SHEOREY

I was told he was stand-offish and arrogant. Instead, an unassuming guy comes forward and offers a firm handshake, says, 'I'm having coffee, will you?'

I was told he was an outrageous flirt and intimidating. The eyes that stare at me (while his hands move dexterously in the transparency box) are penetrating, but curious.

I was told that he was uncharitable that he'd make Kimi sound like a fool, while he'd refrain from making any commitments. Shantanu Sheorey on the contrary proved forthright and eager to talk. As the ace photographer moves light-footedly in his bachelor apartment on Pochkhanwala Road, Worli, loud symphony plays in the background.

It's his first ever interview but he discusses Kimi Katkar and their marriage with alarming honesty.

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Are you really as big in the advertising world as people make you out to be?
I don't know. I am not saying any of these things. You see, people think I am just a photographer. Very few know that I make ad films. Whether I'm king or not, it's for the agencies to decide. But yes, I do charge very heavy fees and I make sure I deliver the goods. My client is seldom disappointed.

There seems to be an aura about you ever since Rekha mentioned you in an interview. Is this deliberate?
I don't think there is any aura. A little curiosity, maybe, and that's mainly because the film world has always had a strange love-hate relationship with the ad world. The ad world has always been considered the step sister of films. Of course, looking at the present turnover of ad films, it should be the other way round. In the advertising world, nobody is bothered. Once in a while when they catch some headline on the hoardings and a colleague may ask, What's hot baby? but that's about all. They are quite snobbish towards the film world. There are reasons for this. The pressures of deadlines in a design world are too many. The operative line here is, 'You live your life and I live mine.'

Tell us where and how did you first meet Kimi?
In '80-'81, during a Thums Up shooting. Initially, she was like any other girl I had worked with. Of course, she was very sweet and I liked her a lot but I had not singled her out for my affection. Neither had she. There were no immediate vibes. No love at first sight. We continued to work together for calendars and other product shoots. Especially for Thums Up. Kimi has a different version, though. She maintains that I did not respond to her. But that's just a joke. The truth is that she was involved with Mohnish Behl those days and I too hadn't settled down in my profession. I was involved in trying new techniques, doing a lot of experimental shoots. My studio was in those days an open den for struggling models.

Then what happened?
Nothing. I went to America for my course and when I got back, my friends told me that Kimi was on her way to becoming a star. I said, what? Kimi, in films? My first thought was, God, she is such an introvert, how is she going to handle this? And that's a fact. For all her independent exterior, she has had a very protected upbringing. Even in those days, Kimi was not very ambitious. She wasn't too hot on modelling either. She was doing it because she had to do something, so with her one foot in the ad world, it was only a normal move on her part to stretch the other foot into films and see what came of it. Anyway, back to the story, I called Kimi one day and said, 'What's happening? What are you doing these days? She laughed and said that she was making a fool of herself, as always. This was sometime in April '88. From then on, I don't know how we began talking regularly over the phone, and slowly we began meeting everyday.

A case of friends turning into sweethearts?
See, there has to be some kind of liking, otherwise why would you date somebody? Nobody meets somebody to waste time. Kimi and I were not entertaining each other. The attraction was mutual. I liked her as a person and it was interesting to watch how much she had changed in the interim. Also normally, models are very defensive about seeking a film career.

And had she changed?
Oh yes, she was more mature, less anxious she still had the

same wacky sense of humour which even today makes her so widely misunderstood. But then that's something that will never change. I have to keep checking her, keep explaining to her that the brand of humour was okay in the modelling world. Not so in the film world. The levels of sophistication are different.

Why do you think she is so bonkers about you? What do you think attracts her to you?
I don't know how to react to that one. It feels great. I'll be dishonest if I deny it. I made it very clear to her that I don't want a working wife. Marriage is a full-time job and after kids, it gets further demanding. When the woman is working, she can't do justice to both. It becomes a fifty-fifty affair.

And what attracts you to her?
Her basic honesty, her integrity, her decision to want to give it all up for the sake of a relationship. It's something I cannot be indifferent to.

The grapevine describes you as a Casanova.
People say a lot of things. My job calls for beautiful women to surround me 24 hours. But all this means nothing.

Those knowing the two of you say that this relationship won't last for more than a year. How do you react to such predictions?
Ask them, why? Let these people who make these predictions come and watch the game since they've made up their mind that this is a circus!

What according to you is the base of this relationship?
The base is yet to be discovered. The fact that she has decided to quit the big buck scene, speaks of her integrity. I am not pushing her into this decision. The decision is hers. I don't want to suffocate her. Already, she has had two directors ruling her life. Until she was 21, her mother. After 21, her producers. I don't want to be the third director. I'm happy with my original role.

How do you visualise yourself in the role of a husband and a father?
I'll have to wait and see. But I'm quite a home-bird. I hate eating out. I love kids and contrary to what my friends tell

me about children not liking bearded men, kids take to me instantly. As yet, I've not met a single kid who has not taken to me. Even in my films, kids are comfortable, otherwise everyone knows how difficult it is shooting with kids.

You think it's going to be easy for Kimi to make a good wife and mother?
I think so. Marriage is a teamwork. If one keeps aside one's ego, everything is possible.

Does the fact that she is a film actress bother you? You don't seem to have good opinion of the film industry.
I'm a perfectionist and I believe that unless you have hundred per cent chances, why hang around and waste time? I believe that if you do something, you do it to your best. Have you seen rock albums? The crowds dance in perfect sync. It's a perfect visual. Why doesn't this ever happen in our films? It just means one thing and that is that the mind is not focussed. Kimi is a bright girl, not as crazy as she likes to project. She knows that she can go this far and no more. She knows that at the end of this crazy journey, there is no pot of gold. In fact, I've warned her that if she is quitting the scene out of boredom, she shouldn't even look at me.

And how does she respond to that?
She says she wants to get married because she wants to be with me. And she is working towards this. She has given a deadline to her producers. And that's the only way to do it. As for those films that have not yet begun, she is returning the signing amounts.

In short, the two of you are all geared up for the big day.
Well, it was never a secret in the first place but since we had not gotten down to seriously planning the details, both of us were being evasive. Everytime we were asked the obvious question, all we did was shrug our shoulders. This aroused unnecessary speculation.

They say marriages are made in heaven. Do you believe in this?
No. I don't. Maybe this happens in the late Rajneesh's ashram, where I'm told everyone is matched with the other everyday.

What are your expectations from marriage?
To be with a person who will see you through life. I don't want to visualize how and what's going to happen in the future. I have no rigid concept of marriage. I don't want to think too much. I'd much rather be surprised by it. It is far more interesting to figure out life, page after page, than just flip through the whole book.

When you think of ideal marriages, what comes to your mind?
My parents' was an ideal marriage. I lost them both in 1962. But if they were living, they would still be together. Strangely, all my reference groups have had successful marriages. Of the close friends and family I have known, nobody has a broken relationship. That's why I am a little surprised when Kimi tells me that she feels worried at what's happening to the institution of marriage. My question is where? Whose? My brother and his wife fell in love when they were in the eighth standard and after so many years and two kids they are still going strong. I think it is great. I maintain that if egos are not involved, if one doesn't compete with one's spouse, it always works. It's bound to work.

How does your family take to the idea of accepting a Catholic and an actress bahu?
They believe in just one philosophy. You have to live your life. So you choose your partner. Caste, creed, colour, profession do not matter. The wonderful thing about our country is the strong support system our loved ones provide us with. Nobody needs the money, but if one knows that one can depend on people emotionally, that's enough to see you through rough weather.

And you're convinced that Kimi is your type of woman.
I don't believe in types. But yes, I knew that the day I decided to get married, I'd find the girl. And I did. It's only natural that the later you marry, the more adjustments you have to make. If you have too many illusions, the relationship is bound to fade. I have no unrealistic expectations — either out of the marriage, or out of Kimi. I'll take her as she is. I'll take life as it comes.

What is Kimi's strength? What is her weakness?
Both her strength and her weakness is her honesty. And that's what makes her so interesting.

What happens if Kimi decides to return to films. It's happened with actresses in the past?

Anything can happen. It is perfectly natural for Kimi to feel restless. After all, she has been working since she was in her teens, so it isn't going to be that easy. What will help will be the atmosphere of my work. She can always participate, read, think, innovate, plan new things to do. She is getting married, not being taken away as a captive.

Do you worry about Kimi's mother? After all she is the only relative Kimi has in this wide world. What happens to Tina Katkar?

We are not settling down in Australia. What's the distance between Versova and Worli? All Kimi has to do is to pick up the car, the driver, and drive down to meet her mother whenever she wants. She can stay there for a weekend, or bring her home. It's as simple as that.

They say your relationship with Tina Katkar is very strained.

On the contrary, we are very cordial. We have no problems. She must have resented me at some point. Initially, there were mixed emotions, I agree. She felt it was a wrong time for Kimi to start folding up and I had kind of punctured the wonderful programme. Not just she, even her secretary felt a lot of things. But neither her family nor her producers can deny Kimi the privilege of doing what she desires. The fact remains that Kimi was never ambitious. I don't think she ever dreamt of becoming number one.

What do you think of Kimi's stardom? How do you rate her as an actress?

I tell her that she looks the same in all her hoardings — it's the same smile, the same expression, even her photograph placing on the hoarding is constant — always, she is given the righthand corner. All that changes is the colour of her dresses. But then why just her hoardings, even her films are all the same.

Why are you superior about the film world? Why do you look down upon film people?

I genuinely feel that the film industry is a fool's paradise. To them the whole world is air-conditioned. As a film maker, I find it unnerving to see such bad quality at such high costs! Once Kimi asked me the same question, 'What do you think

of the film firmament?' I told her that the vision I get is of one big, round *laddu* on which sit hundred ants. Slowly, when the *laddu* diminishes in size, the ants are still there — eating each other. In the end you have just one solitary ant. The film folks circulate within their little groups, meet the same people, talk the same things, their areas are so limited. There are no outside influences, no outside interactions. It's like they are living inside their little wells.

Back to your marriage, has the date been finalised?
No, but it will be one of these days. As soon as Kimi completes her commitments.

What do you think will be the industry reactions?
There can be only two predictions. Either they will say, 'I'm under her thumb, or they will say she is under my thumb.'

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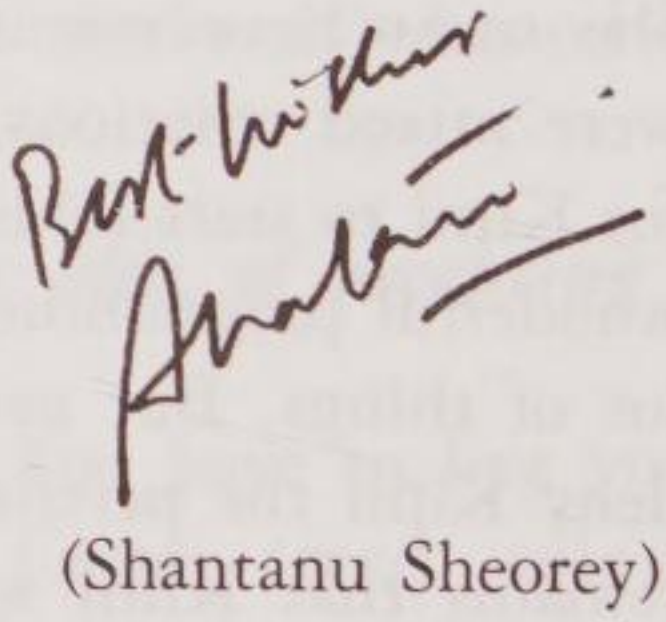
'I'm surprised I agreed to speak on the subject, and so honestly.'



(Shantanu Sheorey)

1990

REKHA

They flirted in February, married in March. Honey mooned in April, settled in May. Quarrelled in June, confronted in July. Disagreed in August, distanced in September. Came October, and it was the end of the Rekha-Mukesh love story.

From the beginning, it was a crazy affair. From the beginning, something was amiss somewhere. What could a glamorous, movie star have in common with an ordinary industrialist? Their marriage was a mystery unravelled, whose climax, one awaited and feared every day....! It finally happened on October 3.

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The first news came on the telephone. 'Mukesh Agarwal is dead!' said the voice. He committed suicide by hanging himself on the ceiling fan. As the hours flitted by, more gory details followed... By morning, the entire city was abuzz with the tragedy! On the streets, posters of Rekha's forthcoming film, *Sheshnaag*, had her face painted in black, overnight. A rather emotional stand on part of the public.

What was surprising was that not just the public, even the film industry wives had taken a stand.

An actress is always an easy suspect. And somebody of Rekha's reputation, even more so. The fact, that Mukesh wasn't as well-known as Rekha, the sympathy further rests with him. But on the other hand, can one ignore the fact that Mukesh was from the very beginning, emotionally unstable? That he had suffered major nervous breakdowns and was even undergoing psychiatric treatment? Can one rule out the fact that he was suicidal, and had in the past too, made several attempts to kill himself?

Did Rekha really destroy Mukesh or is there more to the story than meets the eye? On the other hand, what was it about Mukesh, that Rekha so early in the marriage felt embittered about? Only a fly on the wall, or Rekha-Mukesh can answer. The complete truth in all probability will never be known, for with Mukesh gone, and Rekha playing finger on the lip, the mystery will never be solved....

It isn't fair to blame Rekha until she gives her side of the

story. In defence of the actress however, here's posing a few questions to Mukesh Agarwal's family members.

- Would Mukesh have been as obsessed with his wife, had she not been a film star?
- Didn't the Agarwals think it right to advice Mukesh against the marriage, considering it was an unequal match?
- In seven months, how come Mukesh got so attached that he wanted to end his life for the woman?
- Didn't Mukesh often threaten to commit suicide if his wife did not spend more time with him?
- If he hadn't wronged her, why did he write her a 10-page apology letter, which is now in the custody of Rekha's lawyer?
- Wasn't there some vicarious pleasure in Mukesh choosing Rekha's *dupatta* to hang himself, and leave a note of concern for his earlier girlfriend Akash Bajaj?

Undoubtedly both nursed grievances against each other. Alleged Mukesh Agarwal's complaints against Rekha included:

- He was against Rekha continuing to work in films after marriage and had insisted that she should not sign future projects.
- He detested the idea of his wife performing stage shows and threatened to do something drastic if she left for her shows abroad.
- He persisted that she come and live with him in Delhi and behave like a normal, regular wife.
- He resented her reprimanding him on his dress sense. Of putting him on a diet and shortlisting his friends.
- He resented her extravagant shopping sprees.

Similarly, stories circulated about the grievances Rekha nursed against Mukesh included:

- Rekha felt that Mukesh Agarwal had led her on with false promises of lifestyle.
- She had made it clear from the very beginning that she would not give up working after marriage and Mukesh

had agreed. However, after marriage, he pressurised her to quit films.

- She was committed to the shows one year in advance, and preparations had begun long time ago. Now just because she had got married, Rekha could not back out of the contract, because her husband didn't approve of her doing shows.
- She felt claustrophobic in his obsession for her. She felt embarrassed by his clinging temperament.
- She felt he wasn't worthy of her. Used to perfection, she found him lacking in sophistication.

The Scandal Continues...

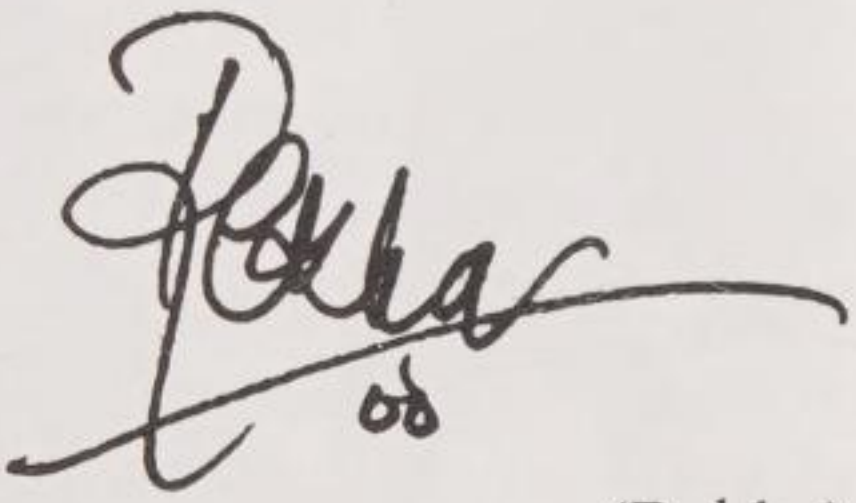
In the wake of the Mukesh Agarwal tragedy, a wave has been created by the media. Till time settles the dust and speculations run rife, we jot down some facts that have been overlooked in the brouhaha to malign the actress. Some points to ponder:

- The divorce papers were filed by mutual consent in September '90. This means, both of them were mentally prepared for the split. Then how come his suicide is being linked with reasons only personal?
- He was always self-destructive. His previous well-known attempts at suicide confirms this. Didn't he on his last visit to Bombay, when in Rekha's house, take an overdose of calmpose and had to be flushed out at a nursing home in Versova?
- If he really loved her, would he take such a risk without thinking of the consequences?
- Rekha had given a written declaration that she had no claim in Mukesh's wealth. Then why is Mukesh's family constantly insinuating that she's after his money? Weren't the Hotline shares slumping when they got married in March '90?
- Reference to Mukesh's mental instability has only come from Mukesh's friends, his family and doctors. Why did they repeatedly talk about it?
- After the first mention of the *dupatta* Mukesh used as a noose, it is taken for granted that it belonged to Rekha. Did it really belong to her?

- On the night of October 4, at 2.45 a.m. Bandra police on orders of Delhi police thundered at Rekha's gate. They wanted to deliver an urgent message to her, they said and should be allowed inside. They wanted to search the house alleging that the actress was hiding inside. Can the police on such flimsy grounds take such liberties? Did they have a search warrant?
- Didn't they also go to writer Salim Khan (whose son Salman was accompanying her at the show) to confirm if she was really on a tour or not?

❀❀

'This was the only article that did total justice to me at that phase of my life. In fact, it helped me clear my name. I was going through my worst crisis, when even those very dear to me had abandoned me. The article was objective and offered me solace without any strings attached. I remember this phase of my life clearly. All the suffering and pain I went through helped me evolve into a stronger person.'



(Rekha)

1991

RISHI KAPOOR

They say the middle child is a complexed child, and Raj Kapoor's middle son is no exception. While the eldest son Randhir Kapoor played the entertainer of the family, whose sharp wit always got the better of people, the youngest son, Rajeev Kapoor was super confident, his self-esteem skyrocketing. Rishi Kapoor, the middle one, was reticent, never completely trusting. The sensitive one, the family learnt to treat him differently. Beginning with his father, who seldom yelled at him, ('I am scared to do so... he withdraws') mother Krishna Raj, could never fathom what went on in her son's head. ('He doesn't say anything').

Over the years, epithets like, complicated, stand-offish got stuck with Rishi Kapoor. So unpredictable was Kapoor that Rekha, at that time, Neetu Singh's best friend, began referring to him as chhote sarkar. *Rima Kapoor, his younger sister calls him a* sadhu, *while Chimpu Kapoor, his younger brother knows that he cannot take liberties with this brother, the way he can with* bade bhaiyya. *Dabboo, who recently accompanied him for the premiere of* Henna *in Karachi thought it would be a nostalgic trip to be travelling with his brother after so many years. Instead, three days later, Dabboo returned home, traumatized. He wanted to touch his sister-in-law, Neetu's feet for tolerating his brother for so many years. 'I went mad in three days... How do you continue to live with him for so many years?'*

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The above and similar incidents, made me want to interview Neetu Kapoor on her eccentric husband. She wasn't easy to persuade. 'What can I can say about my husband that you don't already know?' We are sitting in the sprawling family room of her new home, Krishna Raj at Pali Hill. Maid Rajni serves us tea in bone china, Neetu's mind wanders from children's homework to the cook, (who for some reason is delaying her toast and butter). Partner, Rita Rawail, wants her opinion on the beaded kurta. 'Should it be plain or embroidered?' Neetu thinks for a while. 'Maybe we should make both...' she says after a pause, then turning her attention to me says, 'See, I'm not one of those gushing wives who can go on and on about her husband's virtues. I'm not blind to my husband's follies. In fact, I'm overtly critical

of him that he often asks me, if I find anything positive about him.

I do. I think he is very kind, very good man, a caring husband and a great father, but only I don't tell him so. Good points are not to be told. Besides, if I don't nag him about his nasty habits, who will?

In this exclusive interview, stretched over two hours, Neetu Kapoor, for the first time, exposes a side to Rishi Kapoor that nobody knows. She discusses her partner's 10 irritating habits that make him the man one hates to love.

His phone habits are nerve-racking!

My husband does not talk, he snarls on the telephone. You can call him any hour of the day, and he sounds the same — irritated and impatient. He does not believe in wasting time over frivolities like politeness. He is abrupt, which can be very off-putting to strangers who cannot fathom his curt behaviour. All my friends, each and everyone of them, is intimidated by him. They never phone, until he has ieft for work. And if by chance they do, and he picks up the phone, they disconnect. He is aware of this and teases me about it. 'Why do you have such cowardly friends?' he says. His patience on the phone can only last for 30 seconds. If you are calling long distance, and the phone does not quickly connect, Mr. Kapoor, even when he knows that the call is urgent, will not hold on. He is very particular about getting his messages accurately. Even a slight slip on the part of his secretary, or mine could make him angry. On the other hand, if he's the one to receive the call — mine or the children's, he is incapable of conveying a single message to anyone in the house.

He is paranoid about the children!

He behaves as if only he has children. Everyday, before he goes for shooting when I bid him goodbye at the door, he says, 'Take care of the kids.' He says this every single day as if I don't know my duties. That's not all. From the studio, he will call me as many times as he can spot the phone, and always, it's the same questions. 'Are you okay? Have they got back from school?' I don't understand his paranoia, but he is like that. When the kids have to go for a birthday party, I'm a bundle of nerves because on that day, my husband goes m-a-d ! He's kinky about the kids coming

home before dark. '7.30 is their deadline,' he says at least seven times a week. Nowadays, the children's parties are such an elaborate affair, that the cake is not cut till 8 p.m. Always, the poor kids come away without eating the cake. We dare not take the risk, for his phone starts ringing persistently by 7 0'clock. 'Have they left the party Neetu?' Then, 10 minutes later, 'Has the driver left to fetch them?' and a while later, 'Have they reached?' If God forbid, there is a traffic jam on the way, or the driver stops for petrol, the phone does not stop ringing...

His saturation point comes too quickly.

He's very impatient and wants everything to happen at the snap of the fingers. His impatience is at its peak while at a party. You see, his duration of drinking lasts only for two hours, so when his friends turn up late, he gets angry! 'You guys arrive, when I'm already a wicket down,' he complains. That's why when there is a party at home, he makes sure that everyone arrives on time. He will be very charming, very caring, in fact, he's the perfect host, but only up to a point. When he feels he's had enough, he gets up and announces, 'Folks, the party is over!' He disappears into his room, changes into his pyjamas. When he discovers that the guests still haven't left, he starts switching off the lights and air-conditioners. 'The party is over, don't you hear?' he tells those who are still drinking. He has done this so often, that his friends have stopped reacting. They understand that he's difficult after drinks. Dabboo often jokes that he will not come to our house because my husband throws people out!

He is obsessed with electrical gadgets.

One of these days, I'm going to divorce him because he is constantly tinkering with his gadgets. After we shifted into this house, our major arguments have been on where to fix all the plug points. The installation of the music system especially, was a major crisis and without exaggeration, I thought my marriage would break if he didn't get over the obsession soon. There were roles and roles of wires spread all over the bedroom for five days. On the sixth day, when I couldn't take it any longer, I protested. That's when he stopped checking the speakers from every angle of the room. Left to himself, he would still be experimenting for that perfect positioning.

He is very moody and his moods change every few minutes.
In the morning, he tells me very strictly that he is fed up of dieting and eating boiled food and that I'd better send him something special for lunch. So I send him *biryani,* fish curry and *mithais* that he likes. The next hour he calls screaming at me on the line. 'What's wrong with you? Don't you know I'm on diet?' Recently when Rahul Rawail was leaving for his long outdoor of *Bekhudi,* we decided that we'd go to his house and bid him bon voyage. 'I will come directly from the shooting, you don't be late,' he warned me. I waited until midnight. At 1 a.m. finally, he called me from home to say that he was too tired to drive there. That's Rishi Kapoor. But if you are Rishi Kapoor's wife you are surprised by nothing. You also learn that the man can give you as many surprises, but you can't. Just forget about it. He is too systematic to find romance in your adventures. The slightest change can disorient him. A small thing like if I have told him that I am packing one bag for him, and at the last minute, pack two, he is sure to throw a fit. It shouldn't matter to him, but it does.

His topic of conversation changes too rapidly.
His mind is all the time switching channels and it's very difficult to keep pace with him. During our courtship, I used to find his racing mind very attractive but not anymore. Now, I find it exasperating that while I'm answering his earlier question, he has moved onto the next one. He will ask me about the plumbing in the bathroom and even before I begin to tell him about it, he has jumped onto the next topic — the carpenter. By the end of the conversation, I'm on a different plane and he is on a different one.

He is a radio freak and I hate it.
In today's time of satellite TV and video, how can anybody be a radio freak? But my husband is. The world can topple, he can have a late night and an early morning shift, but he will never miss the 7 o'clock *Vividh Bharti* programme. It amazes me how he keeps track of all the timings. He knows what time is *Jaimala... Binaca Geetmala...* and the BBC news. Even when we are in the car, he will not forget to give instructions to the driver, 'Stop, stop the tape, switch on the radio.' He feels miserable if he has to miss even one song of his favourite radio programme. I don't understand why, for

he can always hear it on the cassette. He insists that it's not the same and over the years, I have learnt not to argue with him.

He is a fruit freak.

Ever since he read somewhere that fruits are good for health, he insists that a tray full of fruits be kept in the bedroom for he may feel like a fruit at anytime. He mostly feels like eating fruits in the middle of the night. In fact, over the years, eating fruits at midnight, has become a bad habit with him that I detest. Just when I'm fast asleep, the man next to me in the quiet of the night goes crunch...crunch...!

His favourite fruit, the apple became a nightmare for me. One day, I decided that maybe if I substituted the apple with a less noisy fruit like an orange, things wouldn't be so bad. But if the apple went crunch...crunch... the orange went pooh-pooh as he was throwing the seeds all over the place, including the bed. Frustrated, I told him that *chickoo*, dieticians say, was best for losing weight. But of course, he wasn't convinced and so continued eating the apple. They say an apple a day, keeps the doctor away. I think the phrase should be changed to, 'An apple a day brings Rishi Kapoor your way.'

He is incapable of packing his bag and will not let you do it for him.

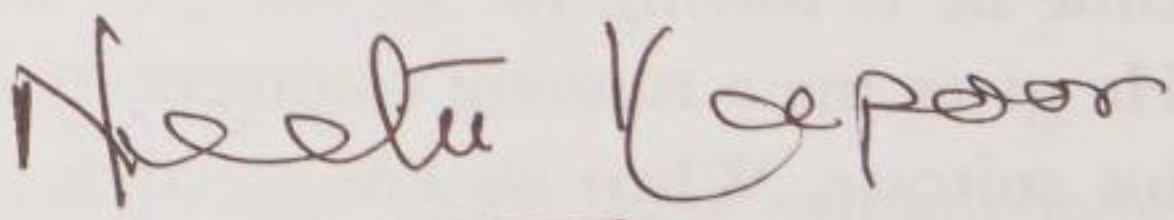
For years now he hasn't been able to find his clothes in his own cupboard. 'Where are my jeans? Where are my cardigans? Shirts?' He'll ask me every morning when I'm in the middle of 200 chores. Now I've hung all his clothes, including the nightsuits on the hangers. Yet, every single time he is leaving for an outdoor, life comes to a standstill. He gives me a running commentary of what to put where in his suitcase. When we are together for a holiday abroad and the luggage multiplies with shopping, he worries himself sick. 'How will we fit it all in? How will you do it, Neetu?' He will ask me a hundred times as if packing bags was the most difficult task in the world. On the last day, as I spread everything on the carpet, he gets ulcers and will hover around me like I am a baby. He wants to desperately help me, but the only way Rishi Kapoor can help me is to leave me alone and allow me to pack in peace!

He was a noisy riser but is changing...

Until recently, he would wake up in the morning as if there was an earthquake. He'd jump out of the mattress, shaking the whole bed with his weight. Then, he'd harshly push aside the curtains and let the sunlight flood into the room and into my beauty sleep. Next, he'd get into the bathroom and bang the door so hard, that even if a *Kumbhakaran* was fast asleep, he was sure to wake up. After this, all kinds of sounds of things dropping in the basin and around would be heard. When he'd emerge from the bathroom, he'd loudly order for his tea on the intercom, switch on the radio at full blast. It took me a while to explain to him that I'm not an early riser and needed to sleep longer and could he, at least, try and not be so noisy. 'Oh, I didn't realise that I was disturbing you,' he said innocently. So we decided that he would henceforth drink his morning tea outside the room. Here again, there was a problem. Rishi Kapoor is not comfortable sitting on anything except on a sofa and the outside room has chairs. So special sofas were made to order for His Highness, but now he had a new complaint. 'The servants don't wake up early,' he said. A special servant has been put on morning duty. Now, finally he's completely satisfied with his tea, his newspaper and his radio, and lets me sleep in peace.

❀❀

'Change and Mr. Kapoor? Call him over for dinner to your home and serve him food after midnight. I will not be surprised if he falls asleep in your living room.'



(Neetu Kapoor)

1991

POOJA BHATT
&
AAMIR KHAN

We asked them for a photo session together because we thought they were compatible. Well, at least they seemed so in Mahesh Bhatt's Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin. *It's only when we started shooting them together, did we realise how incompatible they would be. Argumentative, to the point of being a nuisance, Pooja Bhatt and Aamir Khan ragged each other, barking away like cats and dogs, ready to scratch each other's faces at the first available opportunity. This photo session was conducted under excruciating circumstances. We needed an ambulance, a fire brigade, even police security! Volatile and lethal, the young lovers on-screen, were a riot off-screen. If you don't believe us, read on for the details...*

❀❀

Pooja Bhatt: I hope that's not Aamir at the door. My make-up is not ready. God! That man is sure to yell at me!

Aamir Khan: I bet Pooja is not ready. (Then suddenly spotting her). So I wasn't wrong, was I?

Pooja: If he's going to yell at me, I'm going to walk out this minute. Tell him not to dominate. I'll finish my make-up in five minutes, so just relax, okay?

Aamir: Relax...? I've come running from my shooting and madam is still getting ready. You are two films old now, don't you know how long it takes to do your make-up? Five minutes, huh, my foot!!!

Pooja: Don't irritate me, Aamir, I'm in a bad mood... And learn to speak to a lady properly.

Aamir: A lady, and you? You look like a *bhootni* with those brown lenses. Are you planning to shoot with those hideous things on you. (Turning to us). I won't shoot if she wears those horrendous lenses.

Pooja: Don't! Nobody is dying to shoot with you in any case. Who cares whether you like my lenses or not? I like them and I'll wear what I want. Besides, have you seen your own hair? Have you seen how hideous you look?

Aamir: And what about your own weight? Do you know

how fat you are? (Turning to us) I remember her as a kid in Petit High School. She was so roly-poly. Things haven't changed much ever since, have they Pooja?

Pooja: Look at him, talking like my grandfather. He talks as if he's seen me as a child. I tell you this boy is a pain!

Aamir: Of course, I've seen you as a child. If everybody has seen you grow up, so have I. You think I am fooling you?

Pooja: I'm no fool to be fooled by you. You think you are the smartest guy in the world? I don't know how I tolerated you through the making of *Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin.* A boaster, that's what you are.

Aamir: And what about you? The first time I saw you, I said God! This brat, my co-star? I wanted to give you a tight rap and make you okay.

Pooja: Tight rap, my foot. Try it on your other heroines. I'm no doormat, okay.

Aamir: My other heroines don't need taming. They are all well-behaved. Not like you.

Pooja: Well-behaved means subjugated, I'm sure.

Aamir: Look, how much she talks. A newcomer and opening her mouth so big. I don't know what life is coming to...

Pooja: He is such a pain... A big, big, big bore. Only I know how I've suffered him all through the making of this film.

Aamir: If Pooja is not ready in 10 minutes, I'm going. I cannot wait for eternity till this beast dresses up.

Pooja: If a beast wants to shoot with a beauty, then he has to wait.

Aamir: Have you seen your face in the mirror? Is that how beauties look? Please ask her to tie her hair up in a ponytail. Look, how ridiculous she looks like this!

Pooja: I'm looking fine. It's you who is looking like an

imbecile. And if you like ponytails so much, why don't you make your favourite heroine tie a ponytail.

Aamir: Which one?

Pooja: Don't you know, which one?

Aamir: This girl is mad and she is going to take at least 10 hours to get ready. Why don't I get myself some snacks to eat?

Pooja: I'm warning you folks, he will take one hour to eat four sandwiches and after that, he will ask for another cup of tea. By then, it will be time for me to go...

Aamir: That's right. How did you know, I wanted a cup of tea? Jokes aside, what time do you have to go for shooting Pooja?

Pooja: Nine o'clock. Aamir, please start getting ready. You will take centuries to get dressed and I'm sure you will find something wrong with your clothes.

Aamir: Thanks for reminding me. I had forgotten that I have to get my clothes ironed. Also, I don't have my make up man.

Pooja: What you need is a hairdresser. You will brush your hair at least a 100 times.

Aamir: Pooja, where is my jacket?

Pooja: Which jacket? I don't know what you are talking about?

Aamir: I'll kill you. I want my jacket just now. This very moment.

Pooja: That's my jacket, and I'm not giving it to you.

Aamir: This girl is crazy. Her dress designer is crazy. I give Anna Singh my jacket for alteration and Anna, without my permission gives it to Pooja. That's not all. Without my permission Pooja wears the jacket in a film. And now she refuses to return my jacket to me. I want my jacket today or I'm not shooting.

Pooja: That's my jacket. And who is dying to shoot with you in any case?

Aamir: It's mine.

Pooja: You have a black suit. Why do you need my jacket?

Aamir: Black suit??!!??

Pooja: The same one that you wear for all your photographs. (Then turning to us) He has only one suit. How come you are not wearing that suit for today's session as well?

Aamir: What do you mean? They are two different suits. I don't repeat my clothes like you.

Pooja: Haaah... They are the same. I've compared the two covers, so don't lie.

Aamir: You are such a fool, you won't know the difference.

Pooja: What did you say...? What did you say...? What did he say?

Aamir: Don't copy me. To repeat words and sentences is my style. Learn to be original.

Pooja: What does he think of himself? This man is the pits. What do you mean by your style? And why should anyone want to copy you?

Aamir: I spoke like that at the 'Filmfare Award' function and now you are shamelessly copying me.

Pooja: I didn't even think of that. Who do you think you are that I'd latch onto your every word? Don't think only you have brains. And don't think the world is after you and your style. Imbecile.

Aamir: What did you say...?

Pooja: Imbecile!!! Didn't you hear, or are you deaf?

Aamir: You are a spoilt brat!

Pooja: You are a bully.

Aamir: You are a fool.

Pooja: You, you, Y-O-U are a fool!

Aamir: I can kill you but there's no time. It's 8.30 p.m. We only have half an hour to go. There, I can hear the phone ringing. I bet it's for you.

Pooja: I bet it's Dad. He is going to kill me. I'm sure he is going to kill me. Aamir, please get dressed! They are waiting for me.

Aamir: Let me go and check the phone first. (Returns 10 seconds later with a serious expression) Pooja, it was your father. They have packed up the shooting and your father has said he doesn't want to talk to you.

Pooja: I knew this would happen. I knew it. I'm going to die. What do I do now?

Aamir: Silly girl... moron. See how I fooled you. But seriously, if Bhatt*saab* is really angry with you, what will you do?

Pooja: What will I do...? I don't know. Aamir, will you come to drop me on my sets after the photo session and explain to my father.

Aamir: Why should I? I'll be only too glad if he fires you. I say guys, let all of us go and watch the circus. What say everybody?

Pooja: Just shut up. I'm so tense that my hands are trembling. Where is my hairdresser, I need to dry my hair.

Aamir: All right, I'll come to drop you. Your father will be so happy to see me that he'll forget all about firing you.

Pooja: Don't overestimate yourself. Don't give yourself so much importance.

Aamir: Fine, in that case I will not come to drop you.

Pooja: Stop bullying me and stand properly in the frame. Look, how long he takes to comb his hair. I told you he will take ages. How long do I stand waiting for him like a statue?

Aamir: See, she calls me into the frame and disappears to comb her hair. I'm warning you folks. I will not wait for her while she is busy with the mirror.

Pooja: Stop cracking jokes, Aamir, I'm getting late.

Aamir: You stop cracking PJs. Do you think I have all the time in the world? I hate her perm, it's getting into my nose. Why can't she tie a ponytail? Why can't she, for once, listen to someone sensible.

Pooja: I will not tie a ponytail.

Aamir: Okay. Look ugly, who cares?

Pooja: I'm not ugly.

Aamir: Ugly contact lenses. Ugly hair and roly-poly. Eeks!

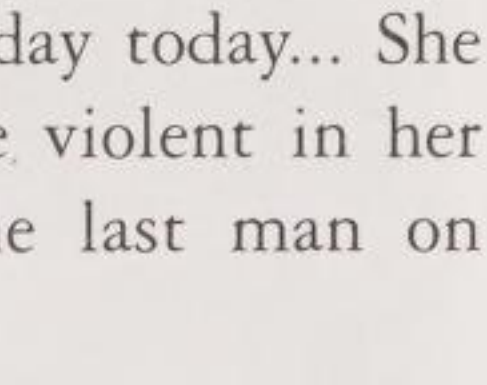
Pooja: You are 'Eeks' and if you say one more uncomplimentary thing, I'll hit you.

Aamir: I'll smash your face before you do that.

Their squabble continued till the end of the photo session. By the time I reached home, I had a splitting headache and photographer Gautam Rajadhyaksha was running fever. A terrible thing happened that night. I dreamt that Pooja and Aamir had fallen in love! In the morning I called both to tell them about my dream. Aamir Khan had just woken up. 'In love with Pooja? I'm sure to have a bad day today... She can drive anyone mad!' Pooja was even more violent in her reaction. 'Impossible. Not even if he is the last man on earth.'

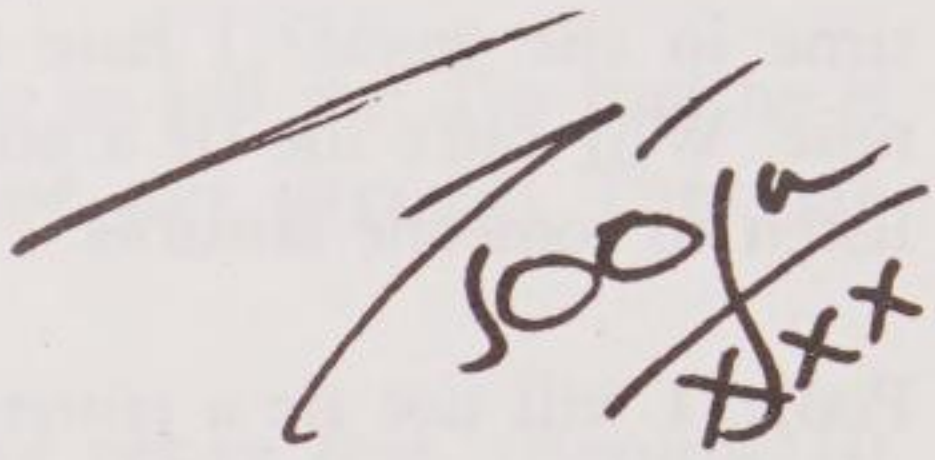
❀❀

'I disagree that I was all that exasperating during the photo shoot. I disagree that I harassed Pooja and I disagree that I drove the writer and the photographer up the gum tree. Bhawana, as usual has exaggerated the whole story.'



(Aamir Khan)

'This is really funny but I bumped into Aamir recently perhaps after a gap of more than a year, and after the first five minutes of social greetings, we were disagreeing to just about everything. He was critical of my haircut, clothes, choice of films. I guess certain things never change. My fights with Aamir Khan is one of them.'



(Pooja Bhatt)

1992

ANUPAM KHER

Life was like a dream for Anupam Kher. He had never been so happy. His films were doing well and his performances were getting critical acclaim. All it needed was a pin to burst the bubble. By slapping a normal fond journalist on the Parampara ***sets, Anupam has not only stirred up a hornet's nest but also destroyed his dream world. For, the wounded journalist backed by his magazine, is up in arms against the actor. Pushed against the wall, Anupam explains why he did what he did.***

❀❀

Why did you slap and not argue your grievances with the concerned reporter?

I don't know how many times I will have to repeat this, that the issue is not the slap but what preceded the slap. If today's scribe is insolent, it's because he knows that the legal system cannot harm him. So, first and foremost, something has to be done about our legal system. Second, my slapping the reporter wasn't an assault. If it was, I wouldn't have stopped at slapping him. Mine was the slap of a common man, not of a star. The star, if you have to know tried all that was within his capability to resolve the matter amicably. The star offered to visit the magazine's office and clarify the controversy with the editors. But they weren't interested. What more could I possibly do in the prevailing situation? Beg on bended knees?

Your explanation that the slap was of the common man, is not very convincing.

The anger was premeditated, not the slap! We were on the sets and I was waiting from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. hoping, expecting that the concerned reporter would come and speak to me on the matter. He didn't. This, after we've had ferocious arguments on the subject over the phone. After I've explained that the story is not true. What surprises me is the adamance of the editors on sending the reporter to my sets. The journalist can publish his story even if I say it's not true. But the actor must hold back his reactions until the damage is done. Why? If the reporter is allowed freedom of expression, why mustn't the artiste?

You didn't feel this need when positive stories were being written about you.

(Sighs deeply). This is a misconception that only positive

stories have been written about me. They've called me a social climber, a publicity hound, a *Naradmuni,* a manipulator and God knows what more. I did not bother because I thought it's all a part and parcel of stardom. That's why I feel that if someone like me who hates tensions, who hates ugly scenes and is not easily prone to anger, can react the way I did, the matter has to be serious! I cannot be judged by the same yardstick as another who has reacted under provocation.

Are you suggesting that you should not be condemned for the slap?

Look, I am certainly not proud of the slap. When I did so, my education, culture, breeding all went down the drain but it was something that was not in my control. They must have really pushed me against the wall for me to have reacted the way I did. What's sad is that while on one hand, we applaud the little boy of *Ankur* who picks up the first pebble to hit the *zamindar*, or applaud Amitabh Bachchan when he fights oppression, the courage is missing in real life.

It is said that you got fight master Tinu Verma to tie the reporter's hands before you attacked him.

Is he some Tarzan that I would need to do this? Is this a Hindi film shooting that I have to walk upto him and say, *'Bol tere saath kya salook kiya jaye?'* If I had to tie him up, I wouldn't have hit him in the first place. There were 200 people on the sets that day, how come nobody is confirming this accusation? I'm no coward to go back on my statement. My well-wishers advised me to say that I was exercising and accidentally hit him. I didn't. If I'm going to stand by all that I have said and done, why are the accusations being changed?

In activating other stars to support you, aren't you being selfish?

How can you say such a thing? How can you charge me with this unfair accusation. I have not forced anybody to join me in my battle.

You mean Anil Kapoor, Satish Kaushik, Mahesh Bhatt and others joined you in the protest for a lark and not as a sign of solidarity.

(Getting exasperated) If the opposition can involve other

journalists to contact their tribe, why can't I contact my association and involve other stars?

Isn't that a contradiction? A while ago you said that you are not involving anyone in your battle.

What I meant was that I'm not asking anyone to support me, except my friends and my association. I went to Mahesh Bhatt because I think I have invested that much in our relationship to ask him for support. The same with Anil and Satish. They believed in my cause, so they joined me. So what's wrong with that?

What's wrong is that you've dragged innocent friends to becoming the victim of a magazine's hostility. Satish Kaushik could do better for his debut release is round the corner.

Nothing can harm Satish as long as his talent is there to help him. He will discover how useless and superficial the publicity issue is, in due course. Stars use publicity as a crutch, they think they cannot survive without it, but in reality this is not true.

These things are easier said than practised. If you hadn't benefited from publicity, you wouldn't have indulged in it all these years.

Yes, I did. But Satish and I have enjoyed friendship for 20 years. When it is a friendship as old as ours, you do things for each other unsaid, unexplained. He knows that if I'm doing *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* and *Prem* for peanuts, it's because of him, not Boney Kapoor. He knows that I refused an ad film because they wanted to replace him with Pankaj Parasher. When the Government of India calls us artistes to do shows for relief funds, we do so willingly. Charity, whether it's for junior artistes or for the country, is not something to tom-tom about.

We are discussing solidarity, not charity. Before this controversy, there's not a single instance of you going out of your way to support a colleague.

They didn't ask me to. If they had conveyed to me that they needed help and had I refused, it would have been a different matter. Dimple, Amrita, Shabana, Rekha have all filed defamation suits against magazines at some stage, but none of them had to go through what I did. Big banners all over the city read, 'Disgusted industry blasts Anupam Kher!'

How do you know that their trauma was not greater than yours? Did you try and find out what they felt?

How can I imagine their trauma, without them telling me? I cannot knock on my neighbour's door and offer him a tablet, just assuming that he has a headache. He has to first complain to me, only then I can provide him with solutions.

What about those incidents when the problem was all in the open? To cite a recent example, Shabana got arrested while fighting for slum-dwellers. Did you think of offering support at that time?

I spoke to her on the phone after her arrest to find out if she was okay. What more could I do? Earlier, she had once tried to rope me in for a protest but it was on my birthday, so she excused me. (Pause). But maybe you have a point. (Pause). I hadn't earlier viewed it in this perspective. Maybe I wasn't willing to face this about myself. I was playing it safe all this while, as you put it. But now that I have a different outlook, I know that this is my turning point.

How?

I may not be the idealistic B.V. Pradhan I once played in *Saaransh,* but I can aspire to be one. Gandhiji was an ordinary barrister until he was thrown out of the train by the Whites. Valmiki, a mere thief before he met Narada. I'm not saying I'm like these great men. But in everyone's life a moment occurs, that changes him. I changed the first time I read Van Gogh's biography, *Lust For Life.*

You sound philosophical.

I don't feel like a hero! I feel angry. For the first time I understand what Mr. Bachchan must have gone through all these years. Victimised for the first time, I feel alienated. To think what the man went through! Today, when I go home after a tired day's work, I'm sad. My routine is no more what it used to be. I don't feel like going to a party anymore. I don't want to laugh, drink and sing the way I did earlier anymore. It's almost as if something has broken inside me!

Could it be that this revolt is a reaction of guilt? Insiders believe that you are raking up the issue to prove a point to your wife?

I will never pay such a huge price to prove a point to my wife. If I was guilty or if I had faulted her, I would

apologise to her in private and resolve the problem in my bedroom, not in the courtroom.

But this is the first instance when a scandal involving you has gone out of gear.

That's what my mother feels. Things were going too smooth for me. Everybody said Anupam Kher has such a fantastic relationship with the press. My argument was that you cannot sustain any relationship on a false base for eight years. The press is very intelligent. I was risking this relationship when I hit one reporter. But it happened because it was inevitable and the only outcome. My mother always said that, 'When everything is perfect, something has to go wrong.' It did.

Do you regret it?

If I did, I wouldn't do this interview. I wouldn't be subjecting myself to such probing. The magazines have all these years, made my positive traits appear like disqualifications. I've never reacted. I've given so many praiseworthy performances, won so many awards, but no article has ever been written on my work. Always it's the image. So, the press can build my image, but not my talent.

How do you think your colleagues are feeling towards you at the moment?

Compassionate. Some have joined me because they wanted to give me support, some for their own conviction, some for the passion of the moment and some because of their own temperament.

You think these feelings will last, if they haven't changed already.

I don't expect anyone to walk with me for life. That they've walked a few steps with me, I'm grateful. I want to reassure them that when the time comes, I will walk with them too. Eventually, I know, I will be all alone in this battle, but it doesn't matter. As long as this lasts, I don't want to doubt my colleagues' intentions. I don't look for reasons in their actions. The truth, however, is, I have never felt as vulnerable as I feel now. I feel like a struggler once again. My image, my status, my power, means nothing in a country where you can disregard the court and disrespect the judge's verdict!

To revert back to the slap, it wouldn't have become such an issue, had you hit him in private.

When he slapped me emotionally with his article in print, was it done in private? You will throttle me but expect me to suppress my scream!! Anywhere in the world, the offence is important but so is the reason behind the offence. My reason is a fair one. My motive was not to punish. My motive was to let him know that there is a right and there is a wrong. And if you will mess up, be prepared for the consequences!

If that was so, you could have reprimanded him. After all he's so much younger.

The father hits the child and not the other way round. When I was requesting him all these days, I was reprimanding, not challenging. The sum total of the ages of these co-editors cannot match the work experience of veteran film makers like Yash Chopra. And if they can badmouth the film maker, what values are we talking about?

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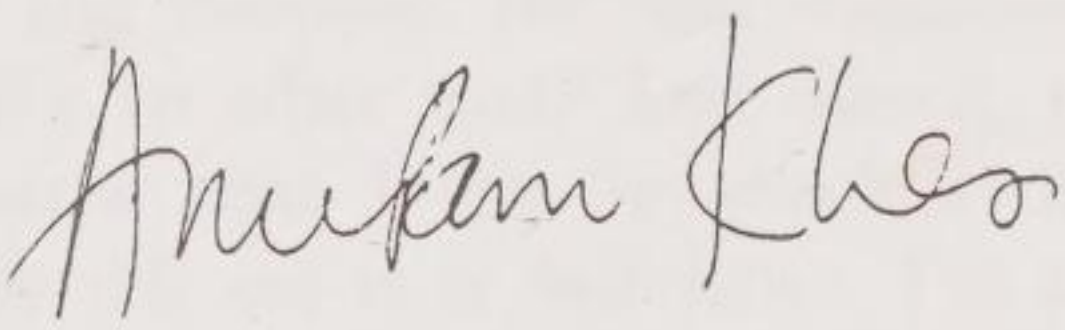
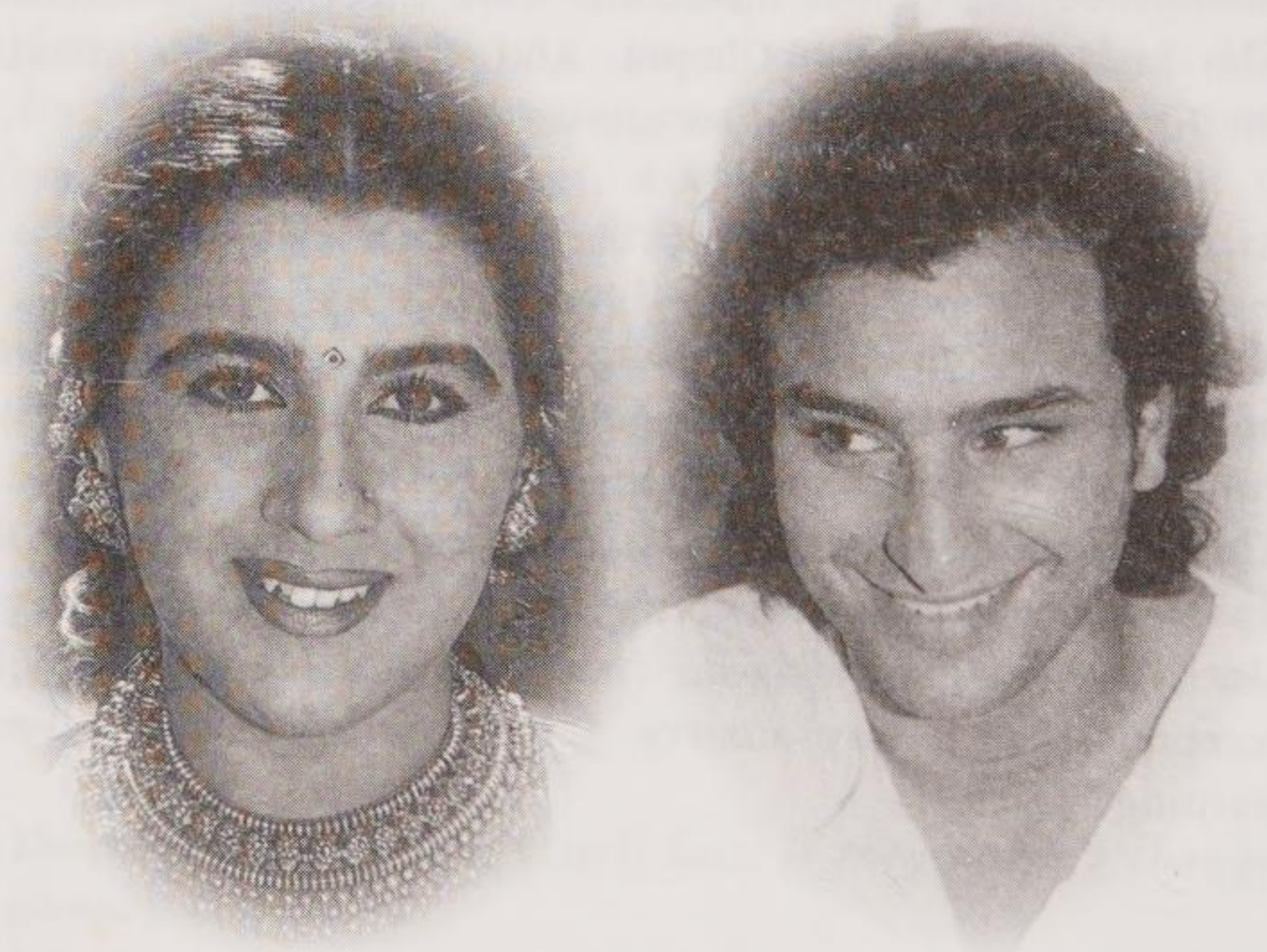
'I distinctly remember feeling very betrayed during the process of the interview. I felt since I had exposed my vulnerability, I held the privilige to be protected. I wasn't. This made me angry. When I read the interview in print, I was more angry. I was convinced I wasn't given justice. Until my fan mail arrived. They were full of praise and I accepted that in my anxiety, I had overreacted. But I'm learning.'



(Anupam Kher)

1992

SAIF ALI KHAN
&
AMRITA SINGH



Six months ago when Sharmila Tagore's son, Saif Ali Khan was signed by Sattee Shourie, the news was hot proposition. Then one fine day, came the shocking news that Saif had been dropped from the film. Shourie attacked Saif with various accusations, ranging from unprofessionalism to homosexuality. Considering Shourie's past reputation, one was willing to give Saif the benefit of the doubt. Within a few weeks of this news, Rahul Rawail signed Saif with Kajol for Bekhudi.

The mahurat *was performed amidst great fanfare and the shooting started immediately. Soon, the rumour mill raised its ugly head. As days passed, stories grew and grew. Saif Khan was missing and unavailable to the director...*

That he was playing truant and bunking acting classes... That he was living in with Amrita Singh... And finally came the news of him being dropped out of Bekhudi. *When contacted Rahul Rawail didn't wish to comment, 'Due to situations beyond our control, Saif Khan and I have decided to part ways.'*

Saif was not available on the phone. A week ago when our reporter asked him where to get in touch with him, he had said, 'On the sets, or at Amrita Singh's home.'

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A few days later, came a fresh angle to the story. 'Saif and Amrita are getting married!' said the source. Unable to ignore the news any longer, we contacted Amrita Singh on the phone to confirm the news. She was hopping mad! 'This is really crazy, first the rumours concocted an affair. Now, they get us married. First and foremost, the film magazine must decide who I'm having an affair with? Last month, a certain magazines insinuated that I was involved with Bachchan. This month they tell me it is Saif Khan. I'm a human being and a highly emotional one, not a hot-water bottle that I go around warming people's beds. Why are journalists all the time contradicting their statements? A few months ago they said that Saif was a homosexual. Now, they say he is a playboy and I'm involved with him. Give me break! Saif is a baby. He is six years my junior. Just because he is from Delhi and we are old family friends, does not mean we are lovers.' There is an interruption. There's a

knock on the door. It's Saif. 'You are going to live a hundred years. We were just talking about you. They want to know if we are getting married?' I can hear Saif's laughter in the background. Amrita continues, 'I don't like the idea of supporting my husband, unless of course, I can take a dowry from his parents.' The two of them laugh. After a while, Saif comes on the phone. 'Hi!' he begins. 'These rumours are ridiculous. I think it would be a bad joke to even start attempting to clarify them. There is no deodorant like success, but first let me achieve something. Let me make a success of my life.' The conversation is getting too heavy to continue on the phone.

We decide to meet.

Within 10 minutes, I'm in Amrita's home. We sit in the family room, Amrita and I on the floor cushions and Saif Khan on the sofa opposite. For a while there is only the sound of the air-conditioner, but as hours pass, my tape recorder moves, Saif and Amrita drop their defences. In between cigarette puffs and never ending refills of *nimbu pani*, alternate hugs to Amrita's two favourite dogs and an occasional firing to the servant, the interview continues. The two of them talk excitedly, emotionally and often on two different tangents. A bit confusing in the beginning, but slowly, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, and the mystery sort of unravels.

'Yes,' begins Amrita. 'What I was telling you before we hung up, is that just because I identify with Saif's trauma and confusion, because I was a newcomer myself eight years ago, must I be attacked with such accusations? Must the journalists drag my name into a controversy like this? I'm not in the film. I'm not Saif Khan's mother or keeper, so spare me. I don't have to be crucified because Saif confides in me about his problems. We are friends and my relationship with him is the same as mine is with my designer friends Abu and Sandeep. How come nobody questions me about them? Not that I care for these rumours. And I'm not going to stop seeing Saif because of them. It's not fair to him. He has no friends in Bombay, except me. It's not fair that the press keeps accusing me of wrecking his career and reputation. If I was as destructive as they make me out to be, if I keep him awake all night and don't allow him to go

for shootings, how come I go for my shootings, regularly? If I was having late nights, won't I look haggard?

'You don't.' Saif interrupts. 'Neither do I.' Bending over to the table to take another cigarette, Saif takes over the conversation. 'I'm still reeling from the shock. I'm still not sure how I'm supposed to react? When I first got to know that I was dropped from the film, I was too stunned. When I went home, I was shaking like a leaf. The stress became so overbearing that I came down with heavy fever. This, when I'm being accused of not being involved. If I was not involved, would I get fever? Maybe I'm not expressing myself in the right terminology, but it hurts. If I knew where I've erred, I'd make amends. The trouble is I don't. Still, I apologised because I'm younger. As someone pointed out, maybe it's my attitude. Well, what about it? Why don't they come out with it more specifically? The director does not want to explain. Why leave it all to conjecture? Why make it sound like an Alfred Hitchcock film, where everyone, including the hero is wondering, whodunnit or rather whatdunnit...!'

'According to them, I'm ruining your career,' butts in Amrita folding her legs to sit comfortably. Popping two cushions on her lap, Singh continues, 'Tell me why would I ruin a friend? Why would I encourage indiscipline? Grant me some credibility. Can any producer in these eight years complain that Amrita Singh has been unprofessional? I was shooting all of last month with Ramesh Sippy and Yash Chopra. Ask them if I was late even on one day? Why don't you ask my other directors if I have bunked even one shift in the last eight years? No producer, unless he owes me money can accuse me of being unprofessional. Why, even Vinod Khanna has gone on record to say that Amrita Singh is too disciplined to mess up her shooting schedule, just because she is distressed in her personal life. Shouldn't that speak volumes about my professionalism? If I can be so dedicated towards my work, would I encourage a youngster to be so careless? On the contrary, I'm all the time reprimanding Saif. But who cares for the truth? Everyone is so busy listing allegations, calling me blasphemous. It's because I'm not diplomatic. Even I have my saturation point. I can take scandals upto a point. You want to do my character assassination, because you think it's your birthright. I have

to analyse this but there is something about my personality that I'm forever inviting trouble.'

'And what about me?' chuckles Saif, running his fingers through his unruly hair. 'Looks like I'm controversy-prone. Even the first time wasn't my fault. There was a contract between Sattee Shourie and Anand Mahendroo. At some stage, for some reasons, the producer and the director fell through. They began pulling me on their side. I was going bananas and needed a break from the filth the magazines were writing. I let it pass because in my heart, I knew that the allegations were unfounded. My first reaction was to laugh it off, even though it hurt deeply. I guess, I'll have to learn to show my sensitivity in a manner the industry understands. First, they call me a homosexual, then a womaniser. Let's once and for all get it straight if I'm a homo or a hetro? I kept shut for the sake of the film.

'Then Anand Mahendroo and Sattee Shourie split. Suddenly, I was all alone in Bombay, without work, without friends and without money. I had made it a condition with my parents that I'd make it on my own without their pocket money. That's when Rahul stepped in. He offered me Bekhudi. *I told him about the mess I was in. He asked me if it was okay to sign the contract. He assured me that the confusion would be sorted out. The film started immediately. We worked at a breakneck speed. I was happy.'*

'You mustn't waste your emotions on trivialities,'says Amrita sympathetically. 'Nothing and nobody, but your behaviour can make or mar you. Specially the press. After *Betaab,* I have lost count of the number of negative articles written about me. Seldom has a positive story been published. Still, for all that they wrote, the press could not destroy me. The truth is that from my generation, I'm the only actress, who is not a media made star. The press cannot make any claims for my success. My success is entirely my own. Without a godfather, without a plug, I've survived for eight years.'

'Eight years, phew! I'm not even eight months old and see what they've done to me,' whispers Saif, getting up to push the dogs out of the room. Ten minutes later, when he returns, he seems calmer, almost philosophic. 'The only way to rise above stress, I've realised is to find humour in

it. Now that F.C. Mehra has signed me for his new film I'm hopeful again. In all this mess, I feel worst for Dingy (Amrita). She is a friend and she doesn't deserve to be dragged into all this.

'It's all so sad, really. I was enjoying working with Rahul and now it's all over. He has his strengths. He's a hard taskmaster, but helpful and organised. Now I hear that he was upset by my behaviour. This is a surprise for me because as far as I can remember, he told me he'd like to draw up a schedule. So a schedule was drawn, where my moves would be chalked out from 7.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. My first reaction was, 'I'm back to school.' I bore it quietly for I felt that my career was more important. A few days later, Rahul had another clause in the contract. He said he didn't want me wandering off and it would be better if I stayed with my friends, Dilip and Tara. I agreed again. Rahul was happy, he said I was looking fit and everything was okay.

'Came the second schedule. On the first day of the shooting, he asked me to report at 11.30 a.m. I land at 11.30, say Hi! to everyone and go for a shave. After that, I put on my make-up, give the shot. Everyone is pleased and it's pack-up. The following day, again, I'm asked to come at 11 a.m. even though I'm required in the evening. After the shot, he says, 'That's it, don't come tomorrow, for you are not doing the film.'

There is a long silence. Saif Khan lets out a deep sigh, looks at Amrita Singh. Amrita rolls her eyes, drinks her *nimbu pani.* 'My argument is that if you want to drop someone from your film, give convincing reasons for your action. To merely say that he was unprofessional or drag me into it, is not fair,' says Amrita. 'This way, a lot is left to speculation. And speculations are dangerous. I can be nonchalant and say time will prove that I wasn't lying, but in my heart I know, that I'm upset by these rumours. How long can one defend oneself from scandals? I want to marry and settle down when the time comes. Rumours affect your personal life. This time I've decided to go for an arranged match. If I can try love, why not marriage? At least, I'll be spared from these questions. I can safely flutter my eyelashes and say, 'Ask hubby.' Jokes apart, I'm no cradle-snatcher. I've loved and

lost enough to know who is the wrong man, if not the right one.[1]

'Precisely,' echoes Saif. 'I agree with Amrita. Personal problems are easier to handle than career problems. I've bitten my nails wondering what could be the real reason for Rahul Rawail dropping me from the film, but I have no answer.'

By the time the interview ends, it's 10 p.m. Amrita has an early shooting and Saif has a long way to go to Carmichael Road. As he gets up to leave, Saif, hesitantly but surely bums yet another cigarette from Amrita's packet. 'You light one more cigarette from my stock, and I'll kill you,' screams Amrita throwing the lighter on his face. He misses the catch and the lighter hits him. 'See, I'd have never made it as a cricketer. My only hope is films, do you think I stand a chance?'

Saif Ali Khan defends the Charges

It's said you came into films because you failed in your training as a cricketer?

I didn't go abroad to be trained as a cricketer. This is all bull that I let down my father by running away from London. Many years ago, my father said that I haven't ever taken Saif to the cricket ground because I don't want him to feel that he has to live up to an image. It's something I've never forgotten. I was never keen to make it as a sportsman. The game does not interest me. I have played cricket in school and college, but I've never learnt it. I think someone's cracking a bad joke and we are unnecessarily getting hyper!

When you became a model, you gave a hard time to your model coordinator.

I don't know of a single agency to harass them. I was never interested in a modelling career. I didn't want to be a model. The only advertisement I've done is for 'Gwalior Suitings'. That too because I like Abraham Qureshi, its model coordinator. He told me of the parent-child concept and I thought why not give it a try. But except for that, I have never sent a single photograph of mine to any agency. Nor have I ever met any coordinator, except Qureshi. So the question of giving them a hard time doesn't arise.

It is said that you are heavily into drugs.

Nobody asks me if I'm on drugs, they've decided on their own. If I'm smoking a few cigarettes, it does not turn me into a drug addict. I have travelled all over the world and if I didn't feel the need to take drugs then, why would I do so now? I've watched addicts closely and seen how they suffer. There's no difference between a heroin addict and an AIDS patient. It's like living in hell and only someone who does not love life, would do it.

Your director complained that you bunked acting lessons.

Yes, this is a fair allegation and I will take full onus for it. I bunked two of my coaching classes, but I don't think that's enough reason for someone to throw me out of a film. Besides, Rahul had himself told me earlier that he wanted me to be natural in the film. I don't mind going for acting classes, if my director wants me to, but seriously, can acting be taught? I thought you either have it in your genes or you don't.

The director also complained that you arrive late for shooting and sleep on the sets.

This is a misconstrued allegation. I did sleep on my sets, but only because I was told that my shot was in the evening. Since there were a couple of hours in between and I was tired, I dozed off. If he minded it so much why didn't he wake me up then? Why is he complaining now? He later told me that he had to shoot with the heroine because I was sleeping. Now, who is Saif Khan that Rahul Rawail cannot wake him up? I'm not God, Dilip Kumar or Amitabh Bachchan. I didn't know that a newcomer was so powerful that he can sleep and the director would wait for him.

The grapevine has it that you are involved with Moon Moon Sen and Amrita Singh.

I had just one outing with Moon Moon Sen and it has been blown out of proportion. Look, I'm too new in this line and didn't know that a casual outing could lead to these repercussions. I didn't know that film personalities don't go for a date in public. Maybe, Moon Moon being older and wiser, should have warned me. She didn't. Don't put Moon Moon and Amrita Singh in the same bracket. Moon Moon is just someone I know, while Amrita is a friend and will always remain so.

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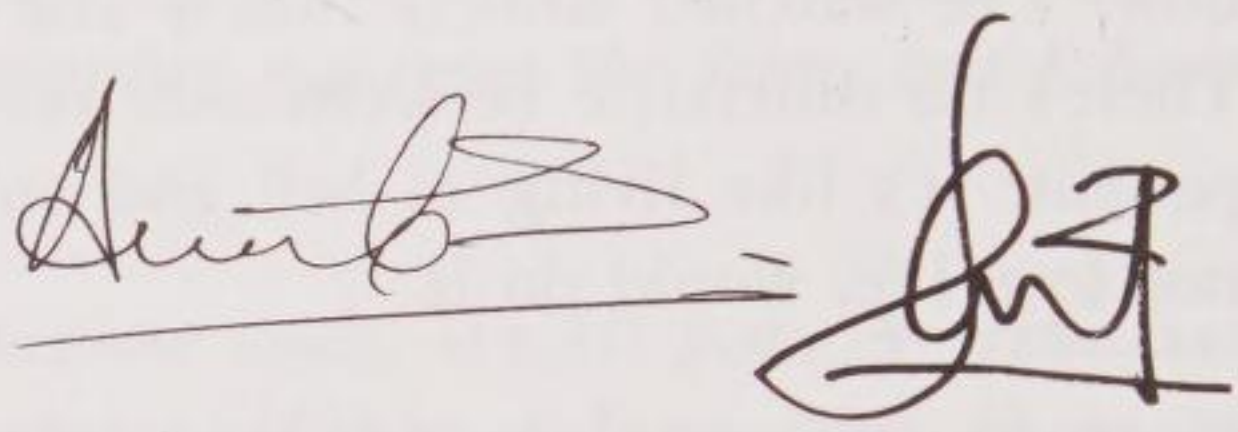
'Normally senior journalists are taking the new stars for a ride. We felt so guilty about deliberately misleading a trusting journalist. That is why, when we were ready to declare our marriage, we personally phoned and apologised for the earlier interview.'



(Amrita & Saif Ali Khan)

1993

SRIDEVI

She is leaving for Madras the next morning and her evening is packed with appointments. You tell her you are pressed for time and need to do the interview at the earliest. She reflects for a while. 'Is 8 o'clock too late for you?' she asks gently. At 8.00 p.m. you reach the gates of the posh 'Green Acres' at Lokhandwala, Versova. The building is glamorous enough to be mistaken for a five-star hotel. The security does not allow the vehicle to pass until they've confirmed your appointment on the intercom. Inside the building, the watchman has yet another round of questions to ask. After what seems ages, you reach the apartment. A screen is attached to the door-bell. A puny servant boy dressed in brown uniform opens the door, leads you to the living-room with shining marble floor. Done up in soothing peach and white decor, the house is designed by Neetu Kohli, famous for her pillar-painting-heavy-curtain look. The room is in a strange way reflective of the actress. The orchids in the elegant vase and the low volume telephone stand in reverence of her status. The ugly but safe grills over her window, speaks of her pragmatism. There is more... Everytime the kitchen door opens, a familiar aroma of home cooked sambar fill your nostrils and everytime Sridevi walks in and out of her bedroom, melodious notes from Mani Ratnam's latest Tamil film fill the atmosphere. Sridevi is at home and you can tell that from the way she walks barefoot, her permed hair pushed back with an hairband, face devoid of make-up.

In the interview that follows, she discusses her past — Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja, *her future,* Gumrah *and most important — herself. In probably her first candid interview related to work, she analyses on how the actress prepares for a role. Sipping strawberry milkshake she waits for your first question.*

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You must be disappointed that Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja ***didn't do well.***

Definitely. It's only natural, isn't it? We all tried our level best, but five years is a long time. Trends change, moods and fashion change. Maybe we lost out to time.

How affected are you when a film of yours flops? How do you cope with such setbacks?
See, I'm miserable only when I'm told that I'm not good in the film. The box-office faring is not in my control, so I don't get depressed. Instead, I try and find out where I've gone wrong and if possible, rectify my mistake in the next film.

How critical is your family about your work?
Very critical. They seldom like my work. When they do, they tell me so. You'd be surprised, but they are very accurate in their judgment of my films. Rarely, has a film they have not liked done good business.

What about you? Are you satisfied with your performances?
I'm never satisfied (smiles). I find mistakes in everything. Everytime I watch my film, I feel I could have done better.

How do you decide on a film? What are the criterias that make you accept or reject an offer?
The story, the director, the credibility of the producer. After a point, one does not care for the trappings, or even for the milestones. One does films because one enjoys doing them. I'm probably at that stage now.

Film-makers complain that you take a very long time to decide on a film. Is this deliberate?
Today, Yash Chopra, Mahesh Bhatt, Saawan Kumar Tak understand that if I take a long time to decide, it isn't out of arrogance or pride. It's because I'm shy with new people. I don't want to say 'yes' in a hurry and regret it later. The delay is more out of my own confusion than out of distrust. But once I say 'yes', my film-makers know that there will be no problems on the sets.

How does the actress in you prepare for a role?
Prepare? (blinks). There's no definite process of preparation as such. Before the schedule, I go through the routine costume trials with my dress-designer. On the sets, the director briefs me on the scene. As you are aware, here we come to know the scene only when we begin shooting it.

Would you say you are a spontaneous actress?
I frankly haven't thought on such lines. But I guess I'm

better with my first take. There are a lot of actors who improve with extra takes, but for me I feel the intensity diminishes.

Can you give instances?
There was a scene in *Roop Ki Rani...* which I did with great feeling but nobody else seemed to think so. In contrast, the flag scene in *Khuda Gawah*, where I weep thinking of the hero was shot amidst a lot of tension. I felt I was very awkward in the scene and didn't do it well. In the final cut, the scene is very effective, though.

Do you have friends with whom you discuss your work?
No.

Do you miss having such a friend?
Since I've never had one, I wouldn't know.

Do you question your writer about your role? If you disagree with the director, do you express your point of view?
I do what I'm told. Sometimes, when I am uncomfortable with what is given to me, I do give suggestions but only when I'm absolutely sure that they will not misunderstand my intention.

A little while ago you mentioned that you don't think about your role unless you are on the sets. What about the story narrations, surely you get some idea at that time.
Well, one does get a rough idea about the film during the narrations. There are some directors who are great story-tellers, while others are great technicians. Balu Mahendru's narration of *Monndram Pirai*, for instance, was a frame-to-frame narration of the film. Would you believe he took three hours to tell the story?

If you were to reshoot Sadma ***today, what are the changes you would like to incorporate in your performance?***
First and foremost, I'm not sure if I would be able to do the *Sadma* again. Already, I have done it twice. I think doing *Sadma* would be far more difficult now, than it was a few years ago. Now I'm older and not as innocent.

How do you work upon your characters? Do you have a role-model?
No... I don't know what is a role-model. Most of the time,

the characters are from the director's imagination. So I do what is in the script. Sometimes, however, the character develops without me being aware of it. In one of my Telugu films, for example, I play an office girl forever nagged by her boss. The minute he'd start yelling at me, I'd start muttering to myself in frustration. This happened so naturally, that the director was bowled over . 'How did you think of it?' he asked me when the final print was out.

In Jaanbaz ***you've played the drug addict with a swagger that is believable. How do you dchieve that?***
I cannot remember... It was so many years ago. My body movement was the effect of the trolley, for which the credit ought to go to the director.

You don't have any friends and you seldom socialise, then how do you play the ordinary woman you project in so many films?
Because I'm an ordinary woman myself. I lead a very ordinary, common life, even if nobody is willing to believe it.

Working in films since the age of 10 can't be all that normal surely?
Maybe not, but I do get to observe people all the time. I absorb what I see and retain it. These reactions help me later perhaps...

Do you enjoy being a part of the film industry?
I love films. I love working in films. Acting is the only thing I know.

During Solva Sawan ***your director said it was difficult to communicate romantic emotions to you.***
Is that true...? Nobody has told me this. In my early Tamil films, because I was very young and didn't know what love meant, a director asked me to look sad in a romantic scene. For very long time after that, every time I had to do a romantic scene, I enacted the same expression. Only much later, when I was old enough to gather from my own experiences, I did the scene differently.

Your recent films reveal that everytime you do an emotional scene, you regress...
I don't know what you mean.

I mean you become child-like. It's happened even in Gumrah ***— during the prison scene.***
Ah... The character of *Gumrah* is a very mature role. In the prison scenes, the character is supposed to be very vulnerable. You feel she is child-like because she is unsure.

You come across defensive in your intimate scenes. You hold back too much.
When...? Where...?

In Khuda Gawah ***for instance, you don't embrace the hero as someone you've been separated for 20 years.*** Chandni ***lacks the passion of Yash Chopra's earlier film*** Silsila.
I'm surprised. Nobody has pointed this out before. I don't know what to say. Maybe I should see these films again.

Co-stars who've worked with you say you are very particular about your appearance while shooting.
(Laughs) On the contrary, I feel I don't give adequate attention to my looks. I truly believe that how I look, is the cinematographer's problem. It's his job to make me look presentable. Costumes and accessories do matter, however. Very often, while watching a film I feel I should have worn a dull saree during an unhappy scene, or should have combed my hair neatly for a close-up. But these imperfections continue. Maybe that's what shooting is all about.

After Khal-Nayak ***it is said that Madhuri Dixit has displaced you.***
(Smiles) Every few years the media pulls out new names and compares me to them. It's been going on since '82, since the time I came. In a way they are complimenting me for obviously they have not been able to come up with new names to sustain these controversies.

The constant comparisons with Madhuri Dixit, do they irritate you?
Earlier there were different names. Now there are different ones. I think it's a part of the game. I take it all in my stride.

You've made a statement that you'd never do a 'Dhak dhak..' that she has done in Beta.
I said that she danced extremely well but I'm not sure if I

would be able to do justice to the number were I in her place.

Apparently she was upset by your comment.
I said it exactly the way I have just told you. How it appeared in print and why she got angry, I don't know.

You must be aware that she has done a take-off on you in Khal-Nayak.
(Surprised) No, I'm not. I have not seen the film.

For a long time now you have not given a dance that could whip up mass hysteria the way 'Choli ke peeche...' ***has.***
There is a time and place for everything. *'Kaate Nahin Katti...'* was the first of its kind. There have been so many versions after that but none have been as effective. You can call it the magic of the first but even if I want to, I will not be able to repeat a *'Hawa Hawaai..'* or *'Raaste mein woh khada tha...'* of *Chaalbaaz*.

What do you think clicked about these dances?
The picturisation, the situation of the song, the music, everything was just perfect.

Of the future projects which of the dances do you look forward to?
Chandramukhi has good dances. So does *Gumrah*. They are not as energetic or as motivated as *RKRCKR*, but I've enjoyed doing them. They are casual and sort of blend with the character I play in these films.

Are you happy with the way Gumrah ***has shaped up? What are you expecting from the film?***
I'm more than happy with *Gumrah*. I expect from this film what I expect from all my films. Everything (laughs heartily).

What was the experience like working with Mahesh Bhatt?
Wonderful. I've enjoyed working with him tremendously. I was so scared of doing this film. People had told me all sorts of stories about the man, his life-style, but he is quite simple and uncomplicated. The way he inspires his artistes before a scene, the way he explains a situation, it's a pleasure. He does not bind you with instructions. Instead, he helps you

draw from your own experience then leaves you to bring it out in a manner you are comfortable with. The technique is quite unique and not many can do it as efficiently.

In short, you are impressed with him as a director.
Most certainly. I'm not sure if any other director in his place would have chosen a subject like *Gumrah*. Mind you, I'm not saying that he has made a classic, or even a *Mother India*. But in terms of detailing and spontaneity, the film is undoubtedly special! The scene when the prison door is bolted open to take away Soni Razdan to be hanged, gives me gooseflesh, even today. I think Soni walked extremely well in this scene...

Do you have your favourite scene too?
(Takes a long pause) It's difficult to say. I like my expression in the scene when they take Soni out of the prison. I like the way the director has made me crawl into the corner. I also like the scene with my mother just before she's going to die. A sequence like that has not been seen on the Indian screen very often.

The blunt cut wig you wear in the film makes you resemble Divya Bharti.
(Shrugs) I didn't think about it.

Film-makers feel that your being overselective can have dangerous implications on your career.
They are probably right. When I'm doing 10 films and 5 flop, I still have 5 hits to my credit. But now with just a handful of assignments, I'm in trouble. Still, I don't mind. I'm happier this way. The pace of work had become too much and I needed breathing space. It isn't as if the offers have stopped coming. The choice is my own. Opinions cannot rule my life. Don't forget these are the same people who when I signed too many films, said I did it out of insecurity.

Now that you're doing such few films, do you feel insecure?
(Startled) No. Not as yet. I still get my price. I still work on my terms. It isn't just film-makers in Bombay who are complaining, South film-makers feel the same way too. They feel I take too long to say 'yes'. But that's how I am.

How do you see yourself five years from now?
Happily settled down, hopefully.

Is it all that easy — finding Mr. Right, I mean?
(Sighs) See, I don't expect too much from life. As long as he is understanding, caring and loves me, I can adjust to anything. I'm not a dreamer and I'm not too demanding either. Whatever I get, I'm happy. I feel life has been kind to me.

What about memories that are not pleasant?
I blank them out.

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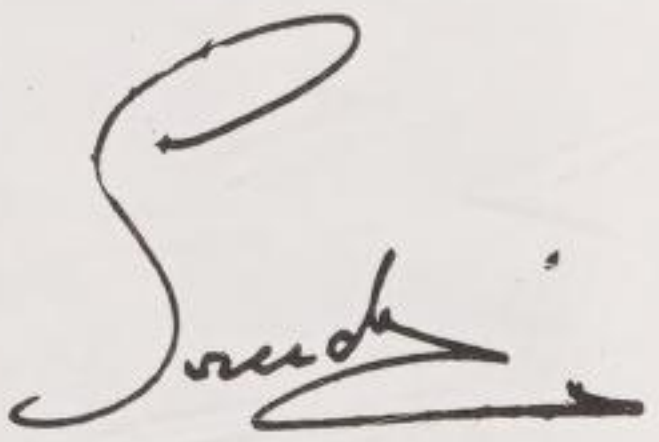
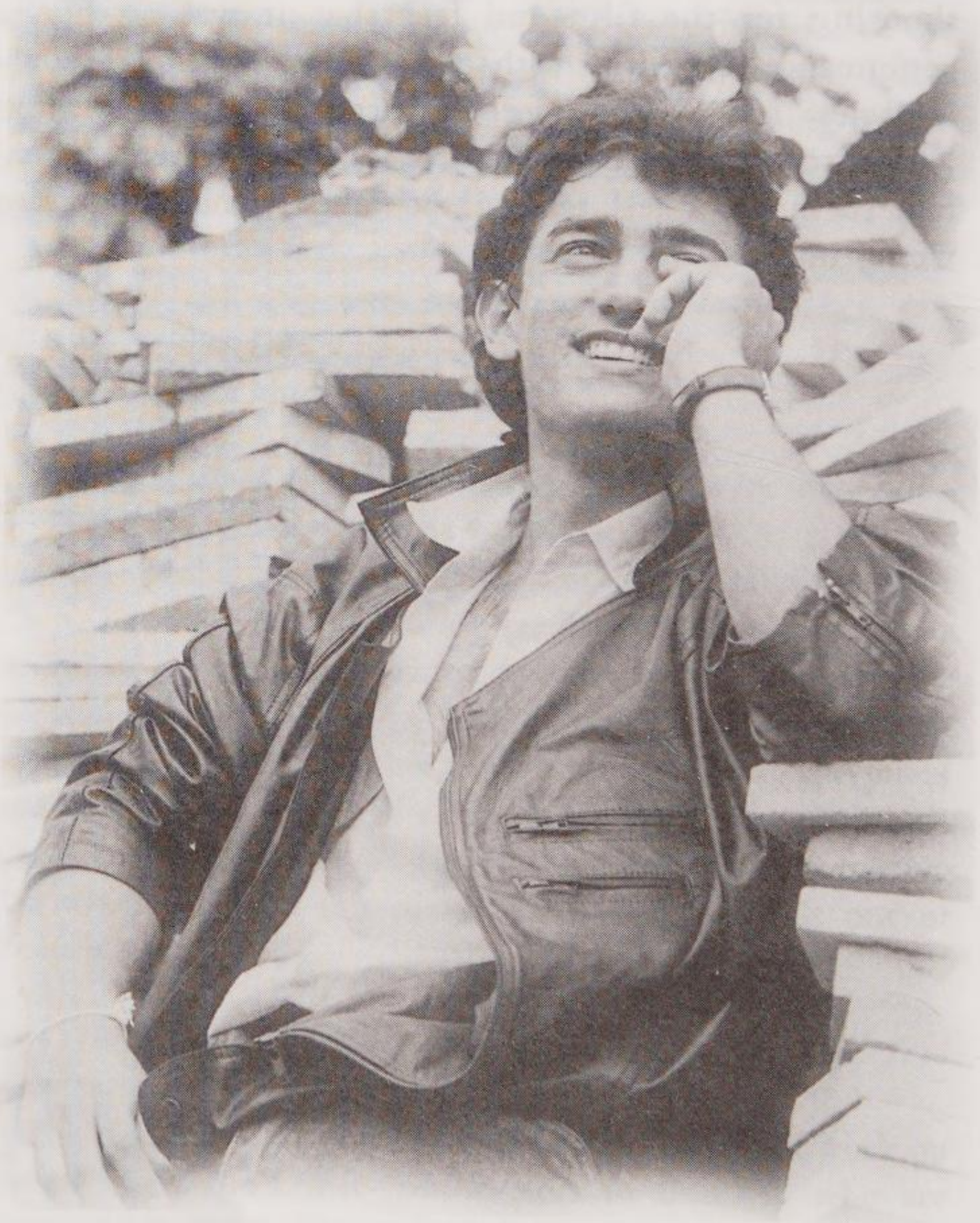
'I still look back on *Gumrah* with a lot of warmth. I enjoyed shooting for the film and feel that it was an honest performance. I identify with my answers. When I read the interview now, I don't feel embarrassed. So many times journalists exaggerate and print very long answers. I don't talk so much. I feel talking too much sometimes creates wrong impressions.'



(Sridevi)

1994

AAMIR KHAN



A favourite Shabana Azmi story about Aamir Khan is when offering him tea, she asked, how much sugar he would like. A simple question and one that needed a simple answer. But nothing that has to do with Aamir Khan can be all that simple. For, while Shabana waited, the teapot on the table and sugar bowl in hand, Aamir looked thoughtful...'How big is the cup?' he wanted to know. Shabana showed him the cup...Pause...'How big is the spoon?' Aamir enquired, the expression more pensive this time. Shabana, trying not to be impatient, showed the spoon... Longer pause...'Actually...' Aamir finally drawled, 'I'm not used to taking small decisions at home.' This in a nutshell is Aamir Khan.

Over the years I've encountered similar incidents with the actor. Hilarious, unpredictable, considerate and comic. It's difficult to slot Aamir in a few adjectives. Articulate yet argumentative, affectionate yet exasperating, you can love him or hate him, but cannot be indifferent to Aamir Khan. That's his strength. The following interview, my first with him, happened impromptu. On our way to a common friend's home in town, we began as usual discussing, analysing and of course, disagreeing.

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How important is money to you?
Money is important, but it's not the only important factor.

Does it bother you that you earn less compared to actors who do greater number of films?
No, because there are other things I'd like to do besides films. These things may not bring in that flow of money but I do them because I want to.

Is your family supportive of this or do they sometimes feel deprived?
They don't feel deprived. I haven't even once sensed such a feeling from them.

One observes that you lead a very simple life.
That's me. Reena is simple too. In fact, she would be very happy if I give up films altogether.

And do what?
Nothing. Go to Coonoor. Spend time with the family. Start a new life.

Why Coonoor?
It's a nice place to live... We've been thinking of buying a home there for quite some time. Call it a dream...

But wouldn't that be unfair to your career?
But your career isn't your life.

But life wouldn't be the same without your career either.
That's also true. It would be different, I agree, but how would you know it wouldn't be better unless you tried it? There are so many options, so many things I want to do but cannot because I'm an actor.

For instance.
Like learning to swim.

Come on, that's hardly an impossibility. Think of the million things you are able to do only because you are an actor.
Sure... Like having the gruelling session I had this morning with my chartered accountant (laughs) Oof... It was awful!

You make it seem like you are not terribly happy about being a star.
(Smiles) I'm quite satisfied with the way things are but I'd like them to be better. I'm slowly working towards achieving that. In fact, I have been at it for the last couple of years. Doing selective films is a part of the programme. At one time I was doing 11 films simultaneously and God, how unhappy I was. Today, I've cut down on my workload and am doing only three films.

And are you feeling calmer?
(Laughs again) Calmness has nothing to do with workload. You are mixing up the two.

In which case what is the logic behind doing such few films?
If logic is what I was looking for, I'd make the best of these years. Instead, by being extremely choosy and fussy I'm doing the most illogical thing. But I do it because I feel like it.

Has it occurred to you that this could be some sort of a defence mechanism?
Defence mechanism? From what? Haven't I worked with top banners, given successful films?

Yes, but not the way Shah Rukh Khan has in recent times. Do you feel envious of Shah Rukh's success?
I would if I did not get the response I do from my audience. I don't think the audience respects me any less than it does Shah Rukh. That he has had two blockbusters in a row, which is what Anil (Kapoor) had after *Tezaab* and later Salman (Khan), does not become a barometer for any star's popularity.

Then what does?
Something more long term than two hits. The current mass hysteria for Shah Rukh was inevitable. They do that to every hero after a successful release. I enjoyed it too after *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*, after *Dil*, after *Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke.* These waves come in everytime there's a hit. It's no big deal!!

Isn't it?
No.

Would you agree that you haven't been able to draw the right balance between creativity and success?
I think I have. Why do you say I haven't? Because there is no hype? Because I don't sell myself hard? Don't boast of my achievements to film magazines? I don't believe in media hype. I don't believe in channelising my energies for wrong motives. And despite this, let me tell you I want to be the country's most successful actor... Let's see, the race is not over yet!

Even though the rivals have overshot?
So what? They did because they had the talent. For myself, I can say that out of my 15 films, five were successes and three, earning propositions. This is a very good strike record. As for creative satisfaction, I can safely say that to seven out of these 15, I'm proud to lend my name to and I'm not sure how many actors can be so fortunate.

Critics feel that you don't market yourself as well as your rivals. That you don't cash in on your success.
That could be true. I don't market myself well. After *Dil*, I deliberately didn't sign a single film, a normal practice amongst actors after a successful release. I don't believe in this artificial enhancement of stardom... It's all so fake.

And Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke (HHRPK)?
It was the same. *Akele Hum Akele Tum* came much later, and very quietly that too.

Talking of HHRPK, ***did you feel that Juhi Chawla got more credit than you?***
I got more than what was due to me. People unnecessarily credited me for directing the film when I didn't.

No contribution at all...?
Well, contribution maybe but then that's the level of contribution I make in all my films as an actor. And considering the script was mine, my involvement was a little more. Also the fact that my father was the producer. But this doesn't mean I directed the film. If I had directed, it would have been a better film (laughs).

Would you rate Juhi's performance better than your own?
No, I don't think so. I think her character was spicier than mine. It had more shades while my character was one dimensional. But I don't think the audience liked Juhi more than they liked me. And if they did, then it's their choice. I accept it.

On to Juhi. While once you two were considered an ideal pair, today she is rated as a better pair with Shah Rukh Khan.
That's because she's doing films with Shah Rukh and not with me. My current assignments include Manisha (Koirala), Karisma (Kapoor), Mamta (Kulkarni) and Urmila (Matondkar) (looks out from the window to wave out at a fan passing by).

When you are travelling, what are your preoccupations?
That's impossible to answer. I think of so many things — sometimes personal, sometimes professional. I muse over my decisions sometimes.

Do you regret your decision of walking out of Darr?
One, I did not walk out of *Darr.* I was removed from the film. Two, I was removed from the film because I asked for a joint narration with Sunny Deol. Initially, the director agreed, but later I don't know why he changed his mind. When I persisted, he phoned to say 'Aamir, let's work some other time.' So I said, 'Fine'.

Do you feel bad now that the film is a huge success?
That the film was going to become a big hit is something I had expected. In fact, that's the reason I signed it.

Isn't that a contradiction, earlier you said that you sign films on choice not because they are going to prove commercially viable?
I said that success and failure are not in my control. But using my judgement for choosing a success or a failure most certainly is. And I was using this judgement when I accepted *Darr.* When I said yes to *Darr,* I was absolutely sure of two things — one that the film was going to click and two, that I was going to enjoy doing the role. My doubts about my enjoying it, surfaced when the director refused to give a joint narration. In a way I was relieved when I was finally out of the film, because this was better than suffering all through its shooting. If I felt sad, it was about my missing out on a very good role.

Would you work with Yash Chopra again?
No. I'll never work with him. Not after this incident. Our styles of working are different.

Apparently you were Vinod Chopra's first choice for 1942 — A Love Story.
I don't know if I was the first choice but yes, Vinod offered me the film which I could not accept because I didn't have the dates.

Didn't have dates? Isn't that strange considering you do such few films?
I don't change my commitments.

Aren't you being too idealistic?
I think that's a very unfair question. Journalists always do this. If an actor does not honour his commitment, the press accuses him of being unprofessional. If he does, like I have

in this case, you call him idealistic. The press has double standards. And I want you to print this. Instead of appreciating what I'm doing, you are asking me to change my dates. (Looks hurt) How can you suggest this?

You view it as double standards, I view it as pragmatism. The fact of the matter is that your loss has worked out to be Anil Kapoor's gain?
The fact also is that he had the dates, I didn't.

Has anybody told you how difficult you can be?
(Laughs) Nobody says that to me. Have they told you that? Tell me one name.

Well not difficult, but your directors often describe you as very demanding...
Ah, there's a difference between the two. Being difficult means being a pain in the neck. An actor who is unprofessional, who doesn't believe in working on his character, is careless about his work and someone you'd like to kick out of your film but don't, because he's a star! A demanding actor, on the other hand, is someone who works on his character, someone who wants more of your time, who insists on discussing details, I agree I am that. (Pause) This is another complaint I have against the press. They ask questions that are not true.

Okay, let me ask you a question that is true. Why are you so argumentative?
(Laughs loudly and picks up the bottle to hit me) I'm not going to answer this because I haven't yet finished with my earlier answer — about my being difficult. If you question any of my directors, they will all say, that at last they've found an actor who is as involved in their film as they are. They are all mighty happy about my involvement. All my producers and directors want to work with me again and again.

I've observed some of them on your sets and feel that they are more dependent on you than necessary.
I have never viewed it like that. I feel that the job of a director is extremely difficult, extremely taxing and demanding. There are 10,001 things for which he has to think of answers... There are difficult moments when halfway during the film, a director feels that probably he is

not on the right track, that probably he is messing up his idea. At such times, he loses his confidence even though in reality he could be making the most brilliant film. At such times, if I can, in any way be supportive of my director, aid him in making up his mind or merely serve as some sort of a sounding board, then it's only fair that I do it. That the director has that confidence in me, trusts me that I will not give a biased opinion, is a compliment. And so far all the directors I've worked with have shown that faith.

What made you accept Ashutosh Gowariker's Baazi ***after the failure of*** Pehla Nasha?

Ashutosh Gowariker is a very talented film-maker and it's unfortunate that his first film didn't do well. But I still think he's going to be rated amongst our good directors. Actually, his choice for a debut film was wrong. It was not a subject that was popular in nature and that's why probably it didn't click. What is attractive about Ashu is that he is adventurous, he wants to try out new things, different things, he has a lot of raw energy in him, has a good sense of scripting and music. And most importantly, his instructions to his actors are very good.

Everyone says that you've taken on this film only so that you can ghost-direct it.

Sorry boss, I have no energy to direct films for others. When I direct, it will be for myself.

You've started to use a lot of 'boss' in your conversation these days.

You are right, I do. I don't know where I picked it up from.

Are you easily influenced?

Depends... Reena has been trying to influence me to watch *The Bold And Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* serials she is hooked onto for a long time, but I have not been influenced.

You talk a lot about Reena?

(Blushes) Come on, that's not true. You are pulling my leg now.

Has your relationship changed after becoming parents?

I think we've come closer. The relationship has strengthened. In fact, I think our relationship is at its best now.

Would you say you are happy?
Well... not entirely. But I'm fairly happy.

Why not entirely?
For one, I'd like to work even lesser than I do now. As of now I'm working every single day of the year except Sundays. I'm working on three films simultaneously and I'm not enjoying this pace. I would like to do only one film in a yeat.

And the rest of the time?
Do whatever I feel like doing. Anything that fancies me like teaching Junaid (his son) how to swim. Just being with Reena, my parents, my brother and sisters, learning computers, so many things... All I have to do is plan whereby I shoot for four months, relax for four months and again plan my next project in the coming four months. That's how Kamal Haasan functions.

That's the professional side, what about the personal front?
Personally I'm fairly happy, in fact, very happy. I have a son, whom you met today, who's the sweetest thing on this earth and most of all I have a lovely wife, lovely parents. What more can I want?

What other things make you happy?
Umm... Let me think, success makes me happy... Good things happening to my family, to people I care for makes me happy... People who are sensitive make me happy... Kindness makes me happy.

And what makes you unhappy?
When things go wrong in my life... Suffering, my own, and of those around me makes me unhappy.

What are your concerns today?
One of my main concerns is that will I be able to spend the kind of time I want to with my son. Right now, I'm not able to... Well not as much as I would like to. And this concerns me deeply. The other concern is a professional one — I would like to be the most popular actor on the Indian screen.

And what are you doing to achieve this?
I'm trying to improve my work but apart from that I'm not doing anything. I'm not grabbing roles, not manipulating right films or banners that could enable me to become the No.1 star. All I'm doing is films that I enjoy doing. And, yes, I'm working hard.

An intelligent actor like you should have extended himself beyond the film periphery. Except for the drug abuse messages and the limited involvement during the Bombay riots, you haven't done much for public service.
Frankly right now I don't have the time. I'm shooting everyday and...

Isn't that selfish? For a society that has given you so much, mustn't you do something in return?
(Sighs) See, this may sound obnoxious, but I strongly feel that society makes me a star because it likes my work. So many come to become actors, but don't make it. It's a wrong concept that the audience has given something to the actor or has done him a favour by watching his film. Amitabh Bachchan is a star because he is talented, there are qualities in him that you love and admire and the audience feels that they get their value for money when they buy a ticket for his film. Cut and dry as it may sound, the responsibility of an actor terminates in the theatre.

And is it possible to always give a good performance?
It isn't but one must try even when the circumstances around are difficult. And try hard. Sincerity has always shown on the screen.

For someone who champions clean films, how do you react to the recent vulgarity in lyrics and choreography?
I look down upon it. Our recent films have reduced women to becoming mere objects of ridicule.

In a smaller dose but you're guilty of this too — Khambhe jaisi khadi hain in Dil *is a prime example.*
I did, I agree and I stand corrected.

What about the increasing violence in films?
My films have never glorified violence. I condemn violence in any form — both on and offscreen. Only a retard, a slow person who is not normal, and does not understand the

harmfulness of violence, can be forgiven. An intelligent person who is violent, knowing fully well the consequences of his act, the motive has to be calculated. So don't give me the excuse of 'I did it on an impulse'. I feel totally alienated from such people. Something just switches off within me.

Is it right for an actor to only play roles that he identifies with?
No.

What about roles that create conflict in ideology?
This is a debatable issue and a bit confusing too. All thinking actors come to a stage when they seek answers to questions that trouble them. It needs serious thought, streamlining of action. The bottom line however being that you have to be responsible for your actions.

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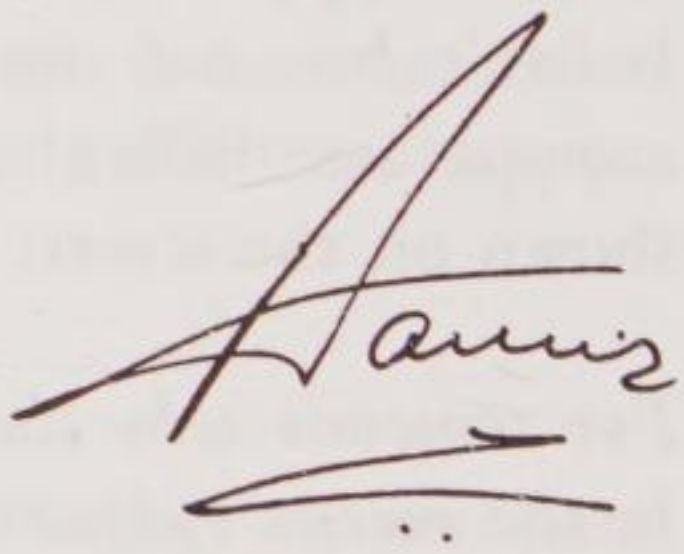
'I still feel the same way. Perspectives haven't changed all that much. Nor have the circumstances. However, whatever I've said, or not said, is in response to the questions asked. My answers cannot be judged in isolation. About glorifying violence in my films, I stand by the statement. It's something I feel strongly about. And looking back, not doing *1942: A Love Story* wasn't such a big loss. I don't regret not having dates. The race is certainly not over. Not as yet.'



(Aamir Khan)

1994

ANUPAM KHER

As a child, he loved building castles in the sand...'It's different you know, from building castles in the air,' he said. 'The former is an optimist, the latter, a fool.' Even when young, Anupam enjoyed the company of grown-ups. Especially his grandfather's. In the morning, they often went for long walks together. Yesterday and tomorrow, together mused over today! Today, which wasn't perfect but which they hoped would someday be better. Like sunlight on a cloudy morning, success came riding on the carriage of Saraansh. *Anupam swooned in the euphoria, but fame is a fickle mistress, so after a heady start that lasted seven long years, controversies replaced adulation! A scandal involving a slap ostracised Anupam, but as the wheel turns once again Anupam resurrects his sandcastle, 'I always knew I would. I'm an optimist. Not a fool.'*

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You have mellowed...

I think it's called growing up. One cannot say one has mellowed for this or that reason. There are several reasons. A few bitter incidents made me realise that in this profession, you are alone. Accepting that was a long, painful process but once I did, I coped better! I'm the kind of man who enjoys people, relishes being happy. I've mellowed not because I've matured... but because I'm a sadder person today. It's a phase. I know I will feel different after a while.

Is that why you have withdrawn?

One sometimes goes through a phase when one only feels comfortable with oneself. Probably I'm going through that phase right now. Somehow it's so much simpler being with oneself. The excitement of being a star, the process of discovering one's talent, of being popular has its moments of high. But the initial euphoria is undoubtedly over! I believe that life comes in phases and right now, I've entered a new phase of my life where other issues, besides films, are also important to me. In many ways, growing up is like rearing a child. Initially, the parents are over anxious — they watch every step of the infant. After a while, when they notice that the child can walk on its own, express a bit, they relax. Today, the actor in me has grown up. I'm no more the anxious parent I used to be. The actor is 10-years-old, mature and stable. As a result, the parent is stable and confident as well.

Those close to you feel you've undergone a personality change — are uncharacteristically cheerless.

A personality change may be, but not cheerless. I can only give happiness to others if I'm happy within. And I know that I'm still capable of giving happiness to others. I might not show it, but I feel calm from within.

You admit to being a sadder person but you deny being cheerless. Isn't that a contradiction?

Happiness like sadness is momentary. Or perhaps sadness isn't all that momentary. It lingers on a little longer than happiness... It depends actually on your state of mind. The other day, I got out of my house feeling not exactly happy... As I sat in the car, it suddenly got windy... Just watching the trees sway and leaves fly made me joyous...! Little things — the way someone smiles and greets me can make me happy or depress me. One thing is certain while sadness depends on yourself, happiness comes out of depending on others!

Does it bother you that you are no more on everyone's popularity list?

At that time maybe I wanted to be on the popularity list of everyone. Today, it doesn't matter. Those few to whom I matter, accept me the way I am. Maybe at that time, I wanted to please everybody, wanted to be loved. I thought this is what stardom is all about... I wanted desperately to belong. Today, I know I belong! I like being in films... It's a warm place but I cannot make everyone happy. It's too tiring. The few who have remained with me are those who matter. Those who fled, were not important in the first place.

How hopeful are you about the future?

I have *Dushmani* though I'm not sure when it's going to be completed, but I'm happy with my work. Then *Prem Granth* and Ketan Mehta's *Oh Darling, Yeh Hai India.* A while ago, I had reached a point in my career when I was getting a little tired of variety. I mean the kind of variety which expects me to be efficient. I was hungry for more meat in my roles. That's why I don't accept your observation that I have mellowed. It's funny, but somehow, one associates being mellow with age. It reminds me of what my father once said, 'You realise you are old only when somebody points it out to you. And usually it's your doctor.' Two years ago

when he complained of chest pain, the doctor said, 'This is common amongst old people'. Until then, my 64-year-old father had never felt old. I don't either. When I was eight, I felt 20 was old. When I turned 20, I thought 35 was over the hill. Today, at 30 plus, I feel old age comes after 70.

How come you don't mind playing an old man on screen? Is it for money? How important is money to you?

Not particularly. I'm neither a great spender nor a great collector of things. I have no great passions. I like watches. But I don't spend more than Rs. 5000 on them. I must be the only actor who does not possess a Rs. 2 lakh watch. I don't even know the names of the best brands. As for playing an old man on screen, it's a role and I have no complexes as a professional. My complexes can be personal. I believe that at different stages of life, different things excite you. And at the moment, I'm most excited about my play *Saalgirah*, my television company and about my association with 'Dilkhush School' for special children.

Initially, your involvement with the spastics was looked upon as a publicity stunt?

I'm aware of that and yes, it did hurt. Always, the first time is the most difficult. After a while when you understand the game, it doesn't matter. You cannot function in life depending on what others think about you. You have to do what you think is right. I don't deny that I was upset when the first backlash came. I was filled with self-doubt, but the school Principal resolved my confusion. 'The press thinks you exploit us for publicity. We believe that we exploit a famous actor for our interest. As long as the outcome is constructive and there is awareness, why worry about what people think?' she said.

Are you hiding an activist in the garb of an actor. Does it mean that the actor inside you is becoming complacent?

The actor inside me can never become complacent. Even today, I'm still in the process of discovering the actor who is a total stranger to me. Somebody I can never completely trust. There are thousands and thousands of shades to him that I will never know of. The search is never-ending. And perhaps it's this restlessness that keeps me going.

Did you expect the award for 1942: A Love Story? ***How much credit would you give the director?***

The director deserves full credit. The advantage of working with a director like Vinod Chopra is that he is open to suggestions. And not just because you are his actor, but because he trusts you as a person. During *1942...*, the fact that the shooting began with my scenes, in a way set the pace for the film. It made it all the more easy for me to understand my character. Whenever I play an older man, I model it on my grandfather. Pathak, like B.V. Pradhan of *Saraansh* has shades of my grandfather — a truthful, honest man. The only difference being that while Pathak is more suppressed, Pradhan is more angry. He is a hero. Pathak, is not a hero. Not a handsome hero, if you know what I mean.

What about the lighter roles — say like the one in Hum Aapke Hain Kaun...!?

I did my first film (*Saraansh*) with the Rajshris. *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun...!* is my second film with them. That too after a gap of 10 years. During *Saraansh,* Sooraj was an assistant director. Today, Sooraj is counted amongst our very good directors and even though I've got nothing to do with his achievement personally, I feel a sense of pride. In a way, we've both started our careers together. Only what has taken me 170 films, he's arrived at it with one film. His journey has a lot of dignity. My journey has a lot of hard work. A lot of bad work too (Laughs).

Theatre, TV, stage shows and films, aren't you taking on too much?

I am. Why do you think I'm perpetually tired? Perpetually stressed (Laughs again).

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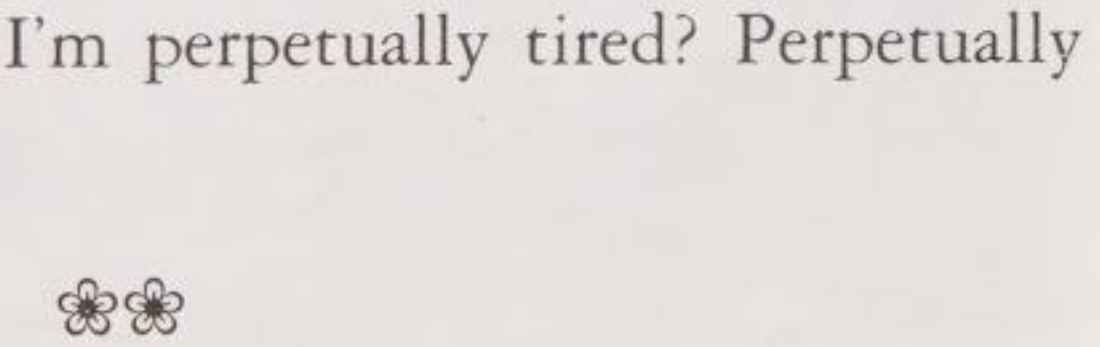
'The interview reflects a happier phase. There is a zing, a bounce in my answers.They are thoughts of a man who trusts. Passage of time and a chain of events have altered my perspective. Today, even though a part inside me is still trusting, a part, I know has changed my mind frame is different. I guess this is inevitable.'



(Anupam Kher)

1994

MANI RATNAM

A collage of scenes from Anjali, Roja *and* Dal-Pati *form in your mind as the lift takes you to the third floor of Hotel Centaur, Juhu. Mani Ratnam is in Bombay for the post-production of his new release. Quite easily the only South Indian director to be equally popular in Bollywood. Appreciated both by the classes as well as the masses, his Tamil film* Dal-Pati *dubbed in Hindi is due for release by the end of the month, while* Bombay *dealing with the '93 riots is slotted for a January release. Clad in a grey shirt and spectacles, Ratnam appears pre-occupied. The pre-release tension is showing. After a brief greeting an offer of coffee, Ratnam gets down to the interview. His sixth since the afternoon. He admits he is not comfortable talking. 'They ask the same questions and I give the same answers. What is in my mind will remain in my mind...' Or maybe sometimes flower into a film. You bide time, make polite conversations with the director. He drops his guard and you ask him to elaborate on the plots of his films.*

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Sunset, one observes plays an important part in all your films. All decisive moments of your characters get resolved during dusk.

(Smiles) One can say it's a good observation. One can also call it slotting. Frankly, I had never thought of this until you pointed it out. Yes, I like sunsets and do agree that human beings reflect better at dusk. With quietude, it's easier arriving at decisions. Basically, I think I'm an outdoor man. God is the best art director and with nature looking its best, I like to set important scenes against nature.

Even rain seems to be an obsession with you. All your films have rain shots against lightning.

(Laughs) That's right, rain shots are repetitive. Perhaps I like rain too. It builds up drama. Even in personal life, moments spent in rain are more memorable than the rest. As a director, I just shoot the film, I don't study and analyse the way a critic does. But now that you've pointed out, even *Bombay* has a lot of rain shots.

Critics describe you as the most inaccessible director in film firmament. Why are you so anti-media?

I am not against them. I just have nothing to relate to them.

My relationship is through my medium. They can review and pass judgements on my work. I have nothing against that. These days I'm learning to change, but interviews, I still feel achieve no purpose. According to me, directors ought to be making films not talking about them.

Not even when they become as controversial as your film Bombay?

What do I say? I didn't want the controversy. The film was originally to be released during the Pongal week but we had to wait till March 3. I certainly don't relish this torture but talking isn't going to help either. In fact the more I'm asked about it, the more depressed I feel. Now the film has been removed from the Bombay theatres too (sighs). Can we talk about something else please?

In retrospect what do you think clicked about Roja?

It's a question only the audience can answer. I don't think a formula has yet been discovered to make a sure shot box-office hit. Perhaps *Roja* was a right film at the right time. Everyone was in a patriotic mood and the film catered to this restlessness.

A lot of people felt that the film should have concentrated more on the terrorists and less on the love angle.

The original script concentrated more on the captive and the terrorist. As the film progressed, we felt it was getting a bit heavy and so reduced the tension of Kashmir and concentrated more on the human angle. Now I'm wondering if retaining the old conflict would have been better.

Is it easy to detach yourself from your work? What is your cut-off point with every film?

Detachment is a cultivated art. The cut-off point is the release or maybe a little before the release. By then you are exhausted with your labour of love.

Most Hindi films take three years to complete.

(Laughs) I've heard that. Down South, we don't indulge in such luxuries. Majority of our films get completed within a year.

What inspired you to make a film on the '93 riots and how strange that a non-Bombayite should make this film?

(Pause) I'm an Indian and Bombay belongs to all Indians.

Maybe it needed a neighbouring state to enable that much distance. The film isn't just about '93 riots, but the climate that the country is going through at the moment. The film is the anguished cry of a generation reflected through a family that could belong to Bombay or anywhere in India. I've abstained from making value judgement. The film isn't about being right or wrong but about being heard.

It must have required a lot of research.
It did. I made a couple of trips, met a lot of makers, saw a number of documentaries, interacted with journalists who've done exhaustive articles for newspapers. A lot of material was supplied to me by 'The Times Of India', 'The Indian Express', 'India Today'. I have gone through all the matter published during the riots.

Everyone calls you a genius...
(Smiles) When you know you are not one, you don't get affected. People can say what they want. I know how much I've struggled... how much goes into achieving every frame. I met Javed Akhtar yesterday who so rightly put it, 'Nothing humiliates you as much as your own work. Nothing can rub your nose on the ground as much as your own work' I agree with that.

How strange that a director of your calibre must feel self-doubt!
How strange that you should react thus! Humiliation and struggle are a part of every creative process. You have to polish the rough edges. Flowering is a very lonely and painful process.

It does not seem so when one watches your films.
Thank God for that consolation. Didn't you know that the screen is highly deceptive?

How does it feel to be a successful director?
Successful? The last film hasn't done well and I was unfamiliar with the equation. Sometimes, it's nice to be ignored. The thrill of surprise is greater. None of us expected *Roja* to be such a big hit.

Are you normally satisfied with your product? If you had to remake the same films, what would you like to change?
This is a hypothetical question. Change is a serious word. I

don't know if I'd be able to change that much, but improvise most certainly. In doing so, I'd lose a few things...(Shrugs).

How long does it take you to get ready with a film?
About one year — and this includes the entire journey from the concept to the execution. Sometimes, the idea germinates for a longer time. These are subjects that need more fleshing out.

It's believed that you don't start shooting unless you have a complete script.
Ideally I'd like to work on a complete script. But that never happens. During the making, you have second thoughts. It's not possible to overrule improvisations. Normally about 75 per cent is worked out, the remaining 25 per cent happens on its own. I've normally been able to complete my films in two or three schedules and preferably with bulk dates from the artistes. I may not always achieve my goal, but I always know the destination of my journey...

Of all your films, which would you rate as the best?
It's a difficult choice and I have to admit I can't be objective. *Nayakan* is a sincere effort where everything fell into place. There have been terrific inputs from the hero. It's always a relief to have a good actor who takes care of the scene. This way, the responsibility isn't just of the director.

Too many suggestions from the actor can be interfering too.
A new flavour is always welcome. It's when you work with a lesser actor that you expend your energies. You try to add up other strengths in terms of sound or visual. Kamal Haasan didn't need any of these crutches.

Your critics describe you as a self-serving director. Do you agree?
I don't make films to launch careers or play godfather. That is for sure. Whether the actors agree to do the part or not is entirely their choice. Ours is a professional relationship and at the end of the day, I'm not looking for epitaphs but creative satisfaction. I want to be recognised and respected as a good director, not as a 'hero/heroine' promoting director.

What according to you is your strength as a director?
(Thinks for a while) I have an overall view which I think is important for film-making. I'm not one of those who concentrates only on few scenes, but on the entire script. I wish I knew the pulse of the audience — I don't think I do. But I know my heart. And I know my mind, and I follow my instinct. The media has made me out to be a wizard, but I personally look upon myself as a storyteller. What you say and how you say is more important than the technique. How you unravel and wind up the story makes all the difference.

And weakness?
No matter how careful I am, I'm bound to lose out on some details. A female fan pointed out that Madhoo has worn too much make-up in *Roja*, her lipstick and bangles could have been reduced after her husband is kidnapped. I agree. Maybe next time, I should have a female assistant in my crew.

It's believed that you are very calm on the sets. How do you achieve that?
(Laughs) I'm a hard worker. Quite like a *coolie* pushing his load. It's not true that I'm always in control, though. I have my bouts of temper but the concern isn't so much with my moods as with getting the job done. Maybe my assistants would be able to answer the question better. When there are 150 people on the sets waiting for your signal and a beautiful orange sun refuses to obey you, which will set into the sea when it's dusk, the stress can be telling! At a time like this you value a crew that is in sync with you... A cameraman who doesn't treat the film as a mere job.

Your choice of subjects have been very varied.
That's the only way to remain fresh and I do so consciously to not get slotted.

Last, are you or are you not doing a film with Amitabh Bachchan?
Not that I know of.

The rumours persist.
I've read them too. I've met the man just once. And quite frankly I don't have any subject for him at the moment.

An hour later, when the interview ends, Ratnam escorts me to the door. The orange sun, still colourful has set into

the sea. Ratnam appears exhausted but is still in a good mood. 'It's been a long day,' he drawls. 'I don't mind working, it's talking about myself that I dislike.'

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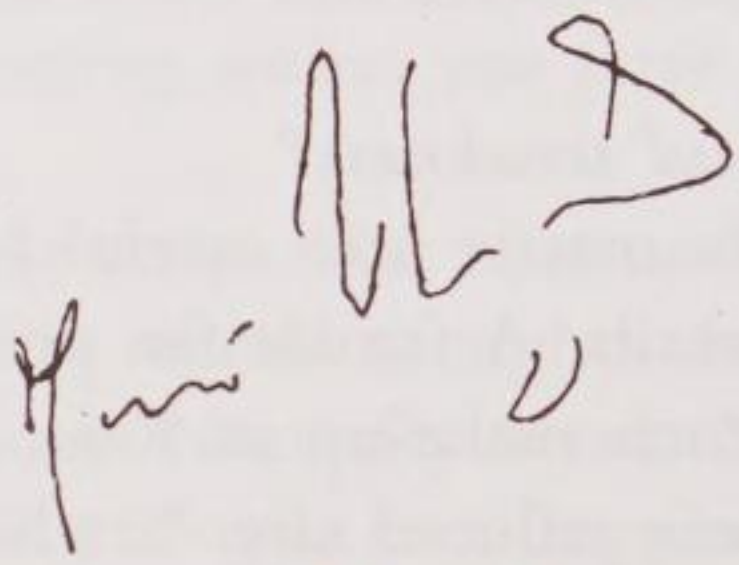
'I have never given as many interviews in my life, as I did during the release of *Bombay*. It made me realise that critics think more about my films than I do. I make films instinctively. They analyse it.'



(Mani Ratnam)

1994

ANIL KAPOOR

He has been dodging the interview since morning. 'It's too hot,' he says while driving to the location. Then, he's too hungry before the lunch-break and after that, too tired in the evening. We are on the sets of Good Knight Films' Kabhi Na Kabhi *in Madras and Anil Kapoor has just finished shooting a stomach-churning scene with screen father Alok Nath. 'We are meeting after 20 years,' Anil explains the story. 'My parents split when I was five. I've come to the library and suddenly discover that the librarian is my long-lost father.' An hour later, in the dining room, Anil cannot understand how anyone can survive on* sambhar-*rice throughout the year. Kamlesh, Anil's man Friday, brings Anil his favourite soup and immediately Anil feels better. 'Actually I'm on a diet of papaya and pineapple. But today, I shall break the rule.' After what seems like ages, the shooting packs up. A quick shower, a few phone calls and Anil is ready to answer my questions.*

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How do you view your career at this stage?
Good. I'm enjoying the films I'm doing. And I'm doing them on my own terms and conditions. Every day, every scene, every shot is a big high!

Sounds dramatic, but what does it mean?
It means that two years ago, I wasn't such a happy man. I had a backlog of assignments. I wasn't exactly proud of but today, the old assignments are complete. Today, I can breathe freely and feel fortunate that I'm working with directors credited for commercial ventures.

You associate quality with commercial success?
The public does and whether I like it or not, I've got caught in the cycle too. Today, I'm very certain that no matter what happens in future, I will not work in films like *Pratikaar, Jamai Raja* and *Heer Ranjha*.

What about Andaz, ***how come you've left that out?***
I signed *Andaz* because it was the remake of K. Bhagyaraj's script. Bhagyaraj is revered like God down South. Film-makers swear by his track record and there was no doubt in my mind that it would shape up to be a good film. Unfortunately, the script had too many alterations. The

songs were included without my knowledge or consent and I went wrong in not protesting. I should have stopped the shooting and packed up. I didn't. But I've learnt from my mistake. Next time, I promise you there will be no controversy.

Do controversies like these affect you?
I wasn't affected by this one because I knew I wasn't guilty. My regret is that I didn't walk out of the set and I've admitted to that.

What other conflicts do you face as an actor?
It depends. My conflict changes from phase to phase. I definitely feel a social commitment to my fans but my main conflict at the moment is of striking the right balance between a *Lamhe* and a *Rakhwala.* To be accepted both, by the masses and the classes.

What else?
I feel concerned about the way marketing is changing in showbiz. We need a touch of professionalism desperately. I've made up my mind that in future I'm going to be personally involved in the marketing of all my films. This is one department where even top film-makers have let down their actors. *1942 – A Love Story,* could have done great business had it been sold for a lesser price. *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun....!* should be a learning experience for all of us. The film has taught everyone not to be greedy!

What made you say 'yes' to Trimurti considering Sunny Deol turned down the offer?
Ultimately I'm a professional. I cannot get into emotional bylanes everytime I'm faced with a crisis! The ideal situation would have been if Sanjay Dutt had done the role. He couldn't. In the given circumstances, granting my long association with 'Mukta Arts', I was the ideal choice.

A lot of people look upon it as a desperate move.
I disagree. No one film can make or mar a star. As a newcomer maybe, but not at this stage of my career. I have an interesting role and to be honest I'm a little fed up of being all the time cast as a younger brother. For a change, I'm playing Shah Rukh's older brother in this film.

No qualms about replacing a man in jail?
I'm not replacing Sanjay Dutt. I'm replacing Sunny Deol.

Sunny could not adjust the dates so I'm taken as the third choice.

And you don't mind being the third choice?
For *Mashaal*, I was the fourth choice, for *Lamhe*, the third, for *Mr. India*, the fifth and both for *Meri Jung* and *1942 – A Love Story*, the third choice. So how does it matter what number I am for *Trimurti*?

Considering the current equation between you and Subhash Ghai, it should matter.
There are no bad vibes between me and Subhash*ji*. It's all in the imagination of the people. Perhaps, they would like it that way.

Okay, what about the bad vibes between you and Shah Rukh Khan? Shah Rukh Khan has been bad-mouthing you in a number of interviews lately.
Not all that is printed in magazines is necessarily true. You are speaking to someone who has been in the industry for a long while, not a teenager. Shah Rukh and I are mature enough to handle our personal grievances without further mischief created by the media.

Are you blaming the media for the Anil-Govinda controversy too? Apparently Govinda has denied touching your feet and called you a liar.
(Laughs) How things get exaggerated! First and foremost, I never said that. Earlier, when *Ilzaam* wasn't released and Govinda would touch my feet, I reprimanded him to not indulge in these formalities , because he wouldn't be able to live up to them later. And that's exactly what has happened. Today, Govinda is so touchy about the sheer memory of the incident, that he flares up at the mere mention of the episode! As far as I'm concerned, I've always treated Govinda as an equal.

After working with equals like Madhuri Dixit and Sridevi, you are now being paired with younger heroines like Pooja Bhatt.
I'm only doing one film with Pooja. Good Knight Films' *Kabhi Na Kabhi*. Pooja is an original and her strength is that she apes no one. If Pooja concentrates on her career, which she has begun to, she is going to do very well for herself.

Is it true that you have been signed for the remake of the Tamil film Thevar Magan ***with Mahesh Bhatt?***
That's right. And I'm also aware that comparisons are going to be obvious. They did so when I did a Kamal remake *Eeshwar*. I'm a great admirer of Kamal Haasan, but that doesn't mean that my performance was in any way less sincere.

Suddenly you are more confident to the extent of being gently defiant. You seem to have undergone a personality transformation.
(Chuckles) And on what basis did you arrive at these conclusions?

People say that you've emerged out of the shadows of elder brother Boney.
I was never in Boney's shadow to begin with. This is a misconception people have. The trouble is whenever you love and care for somebody — be he your brother or film-maker, the trust is misread as subjugation. And you cannot spend the rest of your life explaining the relationship to the people. People either believe in it or they don't.

In between there were strong rumours of a split in the family.
This is getting more and more hilarious. There's no split.

It's not possible that you don't feel mixed emotions towards your younger brother Sanjay?
On the contrary, Sanjay's success will take a heavy load off everyone's chest. *Prem* has been delayed for too long. And now that the film is nearing completion, everyone is feeling relieved. For a newcomer who has not had a single release, Sanjay is doing extremely well for himself and I hope and pray that he becomes a bigger star than me, which I'm most certain he will.

Do you feel threatened by Shah Rukh Khan?
I feel threatened by every good performance, every good role. The actor in me is forever restless and hankering. So in a way you can say that I'm threatened by everybody.

That sounds like an Amitabh Bachchan quote — overtly modest and mocking. From Shakti to stage shows, your

relationship with Amitabh Bachchan has come a full circle.

You are right and what's amazing is that his attitude hasn't changed towards me in all these years. He is as courteous today, as he was on my first day of shooting in *Shakti*. Working with him has been a fulfilling experience. The 19 shows we've done together are not going to be easy to forget, both in terms of professional standards and personal experience.

What's this about 1942 - A Love Story ***facing flak at the International Film Festival?***

I read about it and I think it's unfair to accuse Jaya Bachchan of ulterior motives just because she is the chairperson. Her support and belief in the project is something I truly appreciate.

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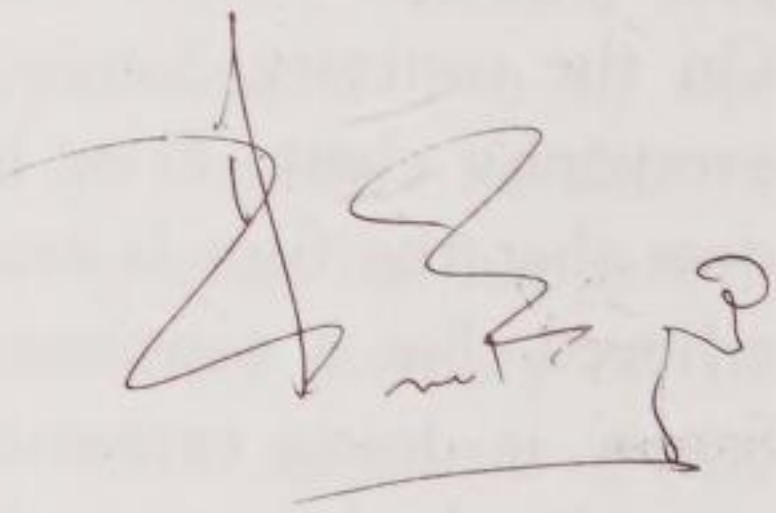
'So many times when the going is rough and I lose courage, I tell myself, 'Not anymore. I cannot go through this all over again.' Reading this old interview I realised that the highs and lows have never stopped and will probably continue so in future. Memories can be very inspiring. Sometimes, it is worthwhile to look back and revive old qualities you lost in the process of growing up. I felt strangely humble reading my old quotes. It was like reading an old letter to a friend.'



(Anil Kapoor)

1995

NANA PATEKAR

The watchman points indifferently to his building gate. From his expression, it's obvious that he goes through the exercise several times a day. You come onto the third floor of 'Sheetal' building in Versova and wait for the door to open. For a bachelor's home, the house is scrupulously clean. Done up in teakwood and beige handloom, the design is simple and symmetrical. There's a warmth about the place that is characteristic. You tell him so... Nana smiles. Looking around the place he says, 'It's functional... Don't forget I'm an artiste, I've graduated from the J.J. School of Arts. I understand colour and I know how to use space...' We move to the adjoining room, his study. A grand piano fills the room. 'I've always wanted one and today I can afford it without feeling guilty.'

The phone rings persistently. Most of them are calls to congratulate him for his recent award. Some of them are requests to grace their TV chat shows. 'What will you pay me?' Nana asks the caller. Turning to me he says, 'DD doesn't believe in paying because it's a government channel. Doesn't the government take income tax from me?' Few minutes later, the caller gets back to confirm the remuneration. 'The cheque ought to be drawn in favour of the Sanstha, I'm associated with.'

Nana's mother, a middle-aged Maharashtrian lady sits amidst us, narrating inane domestic details to Nana. His eight-year-old-son Advait, is jumping around the place complaining of heat. Ten minutes later, he is screaming out from the bathroom asking for a towel. Nana stops the interview, rushes to hand over the towel to his son. Amidst all this confusion, I ask my first question:

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You seem to enjoy being middle class?

(Lighting a cigarette) I was born into a lower middle class Maharashtrian family. I'm still that. Today, I have a little name, little money, which will vanish tomorrow. My basic anger is the same. And even if I can afford more, my appetite cannot alter.

Does it mean that money is not important to you?

I didn't say that. It's important, for it's the only means of

attaining other things I desire. But it isn't my only motto in life.

And love? You seem to be consciously evading love?
I've closed that chapter. Again and again it's not possible for me to get emotionally hurt.

Living alone can be difficult. How do you cope with the domestic pressures?
(Shrugs) Like everyone else. Sometimes the electricity goes off... Sometimes the watchman warns you to fill buckets because of water shortage. I've done that all my life. So what's new?

Even the recent award seems to leave you untouched.
Don't forget that the film (*Krantiveer*) happened over a year ago. For me the moment has passed... Of course, I'm happy but I cannot be stuck in this moment of glory forever. When Sachin Tendulkar makes 100 runs, it's a personal triumph but also a triumph for the country. It's the same with us actors. The award belongs to everyone. It's a result of teamwork.

How did you get to hear of the news. Who was with you at that time?
I was in this very room when a friend phoned to give the news. I put on the television instantly. I felt good but not overjoyed because there was nobody with me at that moment. I was all alone, so after a brief moment of joy it was all very casual. Let me tell you something — you journalists attach too much meaning to all this. I'm a realist, I know myself. It isn't possible for me to accept the run-of-the-mill roles. So in a way I'm not sure how long I will last. *Krantiveer* wasn't planned. The screenplay just happened. Mehul Kumar was spending a lot of time with me during the '92 riots. The film is an extension of those traumatic experiences.

Are you suggesting you've co-written the screenplay?
I've contributed definitely and the director has acknowledged this. It isn't as if I'm taking credit where it isn't due. That's the way I work in all my films.

Don't the directors resent this?
If they mind, they shouldn't work with me.

What according to you is your strength as an actor?
That I don't look like a hero. Common man finds it easier to identify with me. Acting is remembering your real life. That is why it sounds easy but is very difficult to do breathing scenes on screen. One seldom remembers how one breathes in real life.

Why do you only play characters who are oppressed or repressed?
(Laughs) Good observation. Most of my characters have indeed been suffocated or suppressed. *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* and *Thodasa Roomani Ho Jaye* was different... In the latter 'Barishkar' (the rainmaker) was full of faith. The kind who saw something good in everything... *Parinda* was different too. I'm the oppressor, instead of the oppressed.

The media describes you as the '90s sex symbol.
Media thinks of these epithets because my recent film was a hit. How else can they welcome a hero who is ugly?

That's not fair. Nobody has ever called you ugly.
Well, not exactly but close to it.

You believe that?
No.

What do you believe in?
As I'm getting older, it's getting more and more difficult to believe. I still have faith in the honesty of moments...I believe that moments that are real mustn't be suppressed specially when they relate to your vulnerabilities. It's very easy to catch a dishonest actor during a crying scene. The glycerine may provide him tears, but the most important process of crying — the filling up of eyes is always lost.

Who according to you cries effectively on screen?
Amongst recent performances, Manisha Koirala was convincing in *Bombay*. The funny thing about these younger crop of stars is that they don't even know that they are talented. They don't observe, don't search and don't preserve. It's like, it's here today, gone tomorrow.

There are rumours that the two of you are involved.
Ha...Ha... Her choice cannot be so bad. What would she see in a man like me? The speculations started because of Sanjay

Leela Bhansali's *Khamoshi — The Musical*. It's about a retarded man and his adjustment in society. I play deaf and mute. Manisha plays my daughter. We had asked a deaf and mute tutor to come and train us in the sign language. Manisha's is a normal role but one who is familiar with the sign language because of her handicapped father.

How involved do you become in your role?

I'm thinking about it all the time. Once I say 'yes' to a script, the idea cannot leave me. There's a lot of wear and tear in the mind, in the heart. Sometimes I even dream about my characters... I'm used to speaking my thoughts aloud to the walls and to the ceilings. It's almost therapeutic. I don't need to give interviews to give myself a break.

They say lonely people — deprived of adequate sharing — talk to the walls.

Maybe it's true in my case as well. I'm lonely.

Despite all your success, there is a pall of gloom in your happy moments.

(Pause) I'm not a pessimist. I can accept my vacuum. The gloom is a part of my '*karma*'.

Has it occurred to you that the gloom could be self-inflicted?

Of course. I'm aware of my failings. I'm selfish... Too demanding...not deserving of love.

That's being harsh on yourself.

Could be... Some people live their life remembering. Some people by forgetting. I prefer to remember than regret. If there is a loss or heartburn, it's mine.

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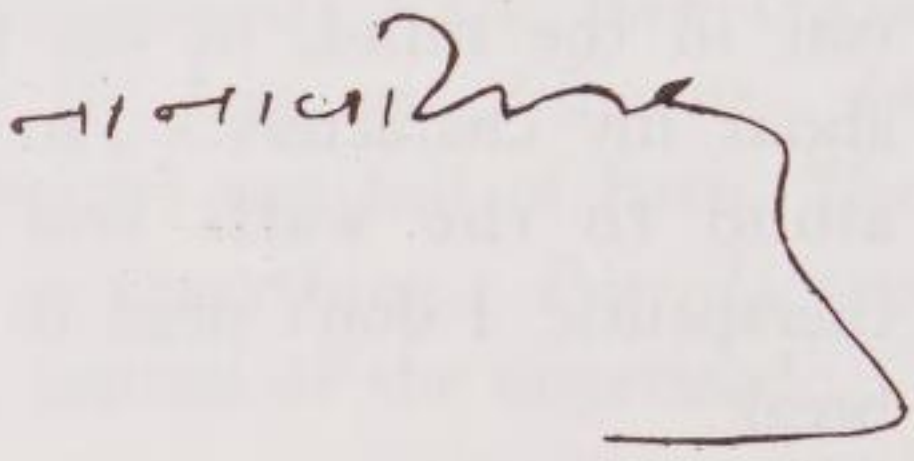
'The motive of an interview should be that both — the interviewer and the interviewee — discover something during the conversation, that they didn't already know. An actor goes through the exercise of an interview because he wants to understand himself. To a certain extent, he does, but there are many areas about him where an outsider's insight can help. If the encounter can provide him with these facets about himself, provide him food for thought,

that can inspire reflection, the effort is worth its while. Then, the actor does not regret spending time answering questions. Unfortunately, journalism today, is reduced to becoming a trap for sensational quotes, rather than holding a mirror to their failings. An interview should help an actor to search himself. Like his films, his thought process should be able to tell his fans more about himself. The trend today is more about personal issues, but I prefer write-ups based on observations.'



(Nana Patekar)

1995

MEENAKSHI SHESHADRI

I've had a late flowering,' Meenakshi Seshadri often said in her interviews. And as if to prove it, recognition, awards and involvements came late in life to the actress. Compared to her contemporaries, even the wedding bells have rung late for her. But now that they have, Meenakshi is certain that Harish Mysore is the right choice at the right time. 'I knew he was the man for me when I first set my eyes on him.' The courtship stretched over 15 months and two continents, until two months ago, the actress surprised everyone by marrying the NRI investment banker, originally from Bangalore but settled in America for over a decade. In a heart-to-heart conversation, the new bride discusses the transitions marriage has brought about in her life.

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Your marriage has been shrouded in mystery.

I don't know why everybody says that... My marriage wasn't sudden or unplanned. I knew before I went to America that I'd be getting married. It was a low-key affair because both Harish and I wanted it that way. In India, a simple ceremony wouldn't have been possible. The other advantage of doing it abroad was that we could both spend more time together. I think the press got suspicious because my parents didn't attend the wedding. But we both felt that it would be impractical to drag two sets of old parents so far away for a simple five-minute ceremony.

Still, it was an important moment in your life. Didn't you miss them?

I did... And they were there in spirit with me, if not in body. Harish and I were talking to them all the time, before and after the wedding. None of the relatives were present, except a few close friends. In fact, soon after the registration we left for our honeymoon.

It all sounds like a fairy tale. Tell us the whole story.

Story? We were introduced through common friends and this may sound a little dramatic, but there was instant chemistry. I knew it in our very first meeting that I was right for him and he for me. Still, practical that we are, we waited and dated, spent more time with each other to confirm our feelings. In the meanwhile we met each other's parents. We didn't want to rush things, so a year later when we were absolutely sure, we took a decision.

Did you make a nervous bride?
No... I was surprisingly very calm. I was more anxious than tense. A little tear filled my eye as I was getting ready but this was more out of excitement, I think. Slowly, as I was going through the rest of the ceremony, realisation was dawning on me that my life was to undergo a major change. But on the whole, there were no jitters, no pre-bridal nerves. I think I made a cool bride... Cheerful and happy!

How would you define happiness?
Not being in one state of mind and accepting that there will be changes. Being with my husband is happiness for me.

Husband? You say that quite naturally even though the marriage is only two months old.
I like the sound of it to my own ears. (Laughs) I told you I thought of him as my husband when I first set my eyes on him. In that case, he's been a part of my psyche for more than a year now.

You sound quite enamoured... Have you had your first fight?
Oh yes... We keep having disagreements. Our first fight came soon after we had committed. Our defences down, we gave each other permission to henceforth not be on our best behaviour... To speak our mind and heart transparently.

Do you accept that marriage wouldn't have been a priority at this point, were you doing better in your career?
These things happen when they have to. Destiny plays its part. Even when the career was doing well, I knew I was going to marry someday. And now when I'm married, I'm not quitting films either. I still love acting and would love to do selective films. Not the run-of-the-mill roles, but films that can justify my presence. I'm aware that such scripts don't come by easily but as Govind Nihalani explained, it isn't just the film-maker's duty to inspire an artiste. The artiste can inspire a film-maker too. Maybe, I should think of an idea that will inspire a film-maker.

And in the meanwhile?
In the meanwhile lots of things. My dance performances. I've realised it's tougher being a dancer than an actress simply because in films, my duty ended when I left the studio to come home. As a performing artiste, there are administrative

headaches too. To add to that are the long hours of *riyaaz*. But my top priority on this trip is my M.A. exams. I have four more papers to go before I can complete my Masters. In all this madness, I'll have to somehow find time for my studies.

With so much happening, do you feel attaining a degree is a waste of time?

No way... I don't look at my Masters as just attaining a degree. I'm doing this course because I enjoy studying. In fact, I'm already thinking what next to do when I'm through with my Masters. Perhaps, I'll take up a Business Management course that will help me understand my husband's profession better.

How much of interest does your husband take in your career?

Like most NRI's settled abroad, he is very systematic and has a thorough knowledge of all that interests him. While he had heard of me much before we met, he hadn't seen too many of my films. Now, of course, he takes avid interest, has made sure he's seen all my important films and is particularly proud of my dancing. More so since I pursue all the three classical forms (Bharatnatyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi).

With him in America and you in Bombay, is yours going to be a long-distance marriage?

Initially, we will both have to travel extensively for a while. I agree long-distance relationships aren't easy and the ideal thing would be to operate from the same city. But given our professions, adjustments will have to be made. The positive way to look at it is that now we will have two homes instead of one.

The present home until recently centred around a celebrity. Do you think the transition will be all that easy?

It hasn't been traumatic as yet and there are reasons for it. My family has instilled values in me that have kept my feet firmly on the ground. I don't know about the others, but the film industry has changed me for a better, more mature person. Today, I'm far better equipped to handle people and situations than I was few years ago. Today, I'm more adaptable and can adjust.

What about your parents? Your mother particularly has been actively involved in your career. There is bound to be a vacuum now.

My brother is a psychoanalyst and he believes that whenever the dynamics change, relationships change as well. His perception of our family is that because we relate to each other as individuals, transitions over the years haven't been difficult. My mother has played an important role in my career and I've myself had a late flowering. Things are already different between us, in the sense that we handle each other better today. We are on the same side of the fence and don't need to control our strokes and volleys. She believes that Harish is a good influence on me.

How would you describe Harish Mysore as a person?

Strong, reassuring and somebody charged with a lot of energy in the way he moves and speaks. Somebody you cannot ignore. He has flashing eyes and a laughter that is infectious. A warm, knowledgeable presence.

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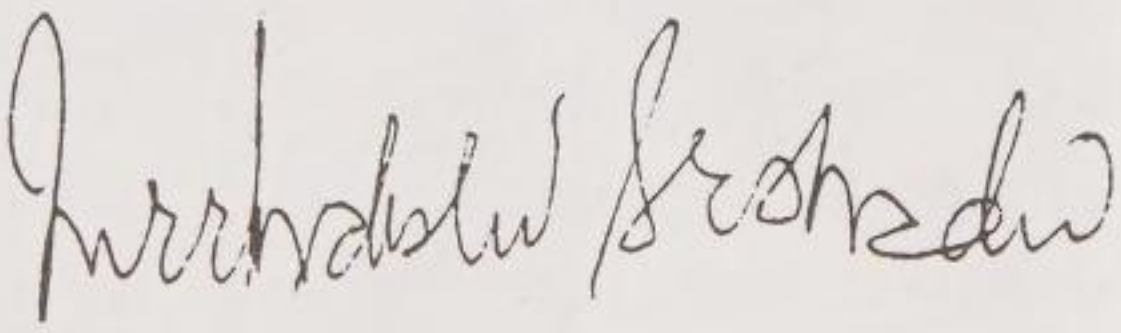
'After all these years and so many interviews, I'm still guarded when asked personal questions. My discomfort when being cornered is something I've not been able to handle. My marriage wasn't a result of my career folding up. It was a conscious decision. Nobody realised that I had stopped signing films almost five years ago. The interview reflects a philosophical side to me. I realised that I can be calm and detached when I want to. At least, that's what I project in my answers.'



(Meenakshi Seshadri)

1996

KAMAL HAASAN

He is going to be in Bombay for nearly two hours, make sure that you catch him,' said wife Sarika on the phone. A few hours later at Hotel Leela Kempenski, there's no response from his room. I toy with the idea of paging him but decide against it, lest it embarrass the actor. Fifteen minutes later, the actor is in the lobby and we move to The Waterfall, the coffee shop for a quick bite. Amidst broccoli and baby corn served delicately on our table, we travel through topics and decades, discuss and argue about films and acting. Over to Haasan.

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Your critics feel there is a smugness about your performance. A tendency to show off.

That must have been during *Ek Duje Ke Liye (EDKL)*. I cannot be accused of showing off in *Nayakan* and definitely not in *Mahanadi*. Maybe this has to do with the phase an actor goes through. I had a lot at stake during *EDKL* and I didn't want to go unnoticed. I think the effort showed. Once the actor is assured of the applause, he settles down. So critics who say that Kamal Haasan is narcissistic are those who're not updated on Kamal Haasan. I take my critics seriously. And if I've to take my cues from them, they had better be constructive and intelligent. If they're going to be subjective, it means they are misguiding me.

Then why were you upset when they wrote about your failure in Hindi films? Do you accept that your earlier shirking of Hindi cinema was a defence mechanism?

It was... Even now I want to do Hindi films, no matter how late it seems. I've made mistakes, but they can be rectified. I didn't want more money than I had, for I believed that corruption lies in the touch of money. Ideally, one should never give up anything without trying. I gave up Hindi films too easily. I compared it to South cinema and became disillusioned. Today, I watch the Bombay scene far more dispassionately than I did in the past. Bombay creates icons like pop singers that don't exist for the rest of the nation. The city has a way of functioning where everything outside it is out of focus. They believe they are the fashion makers. And in doing so, they've completely lost touch with the rest of India and its roots. If *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun....!* clicked universally, it's because it's a rural film.

If you had to do a Hindi film what kind of a role would it be?

One thing is for certain that I'll not play a collegian who comes home with four books in hand to scream, '*Maa mein pass ho gaya.*' It will not be like any of my old films. It will have to be a fast-paced subject. And I'd prefer if it is under my own production. We already have two subjects lined up. One is almost complete. Let's see.

How would you describe the current phase in your career?

There are no major complaints. I'd have preferred it if there was more output. Somehow, a lot of time gets lost in floundering. Even then, my company 'Raj Kamal Productions' has given three major hits this year. *Magaliar Mattu, Sati Lilavati* and *Kurudhipunal*. The ideal situation would be to have at least four releases a year. Down South this is possible. No film is a problem as long as the script is ready. In my entire career, I've never required to shoot more than 70 days per film.

Tell us a little more about 'Raj Kamal Productions'?

It was started sometime in '85. Our first project was an extravagant one — *Vikram* — but contrary to what was made out, the film wasn't a flop. *Vikram* recovered 90 per cent of its expenses. The film released around the same time as my daughter Shruti's birth. In our second film *Kaadal*, we signed an outside hero which a lot of them thought was a big mistake. After that came *Satya*,, then *Apoorva Sahodarargal*, then *Thevar Magan, Magaliar Mattu, Sati Lilavati* and finally, *Kurudhipunal*.

Weren't you supposed to dub Kurudhipunal ***in Hindi?***

The film is inspired from Govind Nihalani's *Drohkaal*. The initial agreement was that we'd dub the film in Hindi after it was released down South. The director however had second thoughts. He said that the distributors were asking for refund from territories where *Drohkaal* hadn't fared well. I was willing to consider the proposition as long as the compromise was mutually supportive. It wasn't. I had to give up the idea because I have my own limitations as a producer.

Why do you think Kurudhipunal ***succeeded?***

I think what worked about the film is the pace. *Kurudhipunal* is not a film for a common audience like

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge or *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun....!* It belongs to a different genre in comparison. Still, I was very inspired when I saw *Drohkaal*. I saw a minimum guarantee in the film and that's why even when *Drohkaal* bombed, I continued shooting. The remake has chopped off half an hour of the original. The South version is less verbose and more emotional.

You've written the screenplay of your last three films. How different is the experience of writing from acting?

Ever since I've gotten into screenplay writing, I only do one rehearsal. Mugging the lines would take away the spontaneity. It's something my director cannot come to terms with. How can you disagree with the lines when you've written them yourself, they argue. I tell them I can. Earlier, I was the writer. Once on the sets, I'm the actor and I'm entitled to improvisations. During *Kurudhipunal,* there was a scene on the terrace. On paper, the scene seemed fine. During shooting, I felt doubtful. So I turned to Sarika (who was assisting the director) and asked what she thought? She murmured a weak 'okay'. That's not the kind of reaction I wanted. We took another take! Unless I have an alternative suggestion, I don't insist on a retake.

Does this happen to you often?

Sometimes. See, in practical terms, one extra shot is nothing but an extra 200 feet of raw stock. I do a retake only when I can convince the director that what I have in the offing is better than the original. Mind you, I'm not always right. During the shooting of the clinic scene in *Guna*, I had to go round the chair in circles... The very first take was fine. But I did two more takes because the actor in me was restless. Eventually, what was retained was the first take. So there are no set rules. Acting is all about flexibility.

What about writing? How and where do you write your scripts?

People often ask me that question. I don't know. I write anywhere. Most of *Thevar Magan* was written in Bombay even though the subject has nothing to do with the city. *Mahanadi* was written in a room without windows and *Magaliar Mattu* was conceived and written while on my jogging machine. When the scene came to me, I would rush to the computer and punch my notes. Comic but true. My

wife understood this and never disturbed me in the exercise room.

Does it make you self-conscious when your wife is working as a technician in the same film?

I'm never self-conscious about anybody. My problem with Sarika working behind the scenes was of a different kind. Sarika and I are too independent in our thinking and therefore often tend to disagree. She's an excellent worker, she's highly dedicated and disciplined and once on the sets does not indulge in playing Kamal Haasan's wife. The unit was shocked when she addressed me as 'Sir'. A lot of them felt that it was very pretentious of a wife to address her husband thus. But I don't think so. The ground rules should be the same for everybody.

How do you work on your roles? All your films reflect a character study. Is this conscious?

There are certain films that don't deserve in-depth study. There have been so many roles where I've just walked into the studio, delivered the lines and walked out. Actors, by instinct preserve energies. I can switch on and off a role in a jiffy. You'll be surprised but I've used a lot of my shooting time to write scripts.

Are you trying to say that you've given all those performances without any preparation?

The preparation exists but it's not always at a conscious level. Here, there, inside, outside the home, influences gather... It's like a buffet laid on the table. Everyone picks and chooses. So do I. Sometimes the combinations work, sometimes it doesn't. For certain films, it's a waste of time to go into an indepth character study. These are roles that don't demand energy. In *Sati Lilavati* for instance, I've only worked on my dubbing. I've spoken my lines in a peculiar accent. And it happened naturally. My co-star in the film who can be best described as a young Aruna Irani has a strong Coimbatore accent. All I've done is to copy her dialect but it has worked wonders.

How important is a co-star for the success of a scene?

Helluva lot. I call it the 'caroming' of reactions. Without the right strike, the coins go into the wrong holes.

Would you say you have struck all the right chords or are there roles you look forward to playing as an actor?

If I were only an actor I wouldn't even mind considering retiring — or at least taking a long vacation — but because I started my career as a technician and acting happens to be a by-product of it, my decision becomes complex. I call myself a reluctant actor because I just happend to stumble into films. In fact, at the time I made my foray into films, the rules were completely different. I wasn't considered star material because I was too well-rounded and fair-complexioned to play the hero.

Your image does not seem of a reluctant star.

Stardom comes accompanied with tight leashes. And I resented this. I didn't want to be the well-trained dog who has to constantly prove to his master. I wanted to be the master. I wanted to dictate, not be dictated. I wanted to pursue films as a dream, not as a nine-to-five job. If I wasn't an actor, I could have been anything from a smuggler to a politician.

Smuggler? How can you say that?

What I mean is that you become what you're exposed to. And since I was exposed to this medium from a very young age, I adapted and absorbed the influences around me as a part of my personality.

Looking back, which have been your favourite performances?

This may sound like a cliché and I've said this a hundred times but the last performance is invariably the best. Perhaps, the actor feels this way because he outgrows his roles. If I had to do *Nayakan* today, I'm sure I'd do it differently. An actor's performance is determined not only by his talent but time, environment, mood and climate. When we were shooting *Nayakan*, the producer was very certain that the film was going to flop. It was much later when G. Venkateshwaran took over the film from producer Srinivasan, that all of us felt confident of the product. All this is bound to affect the performance.

What about the other roles?

Well... *Mahanadi* is my all-time favourite, so is *Kurudhipunal*, but the credit for *Kurudhipunal* should go more to the producer, than the actor. Amongst my old films, I

think I'm competent in *Sagar Sangamam*. At one point, we were planning to dub it in Marathi, but too much time got wasted in floundering. I'd say that *Nayakan* and *Thevar Magan* are complete films. There are effective moments that touch you even today. My performance in *Indian* is okay, but I've donned tremendous make-up in the film. No other actor in India has done this kind of make-up so far. I made a couple of trips abroad to meet specialists and experiment. The role has a zing about it the way Appu had a zing in *Appu Raja*, even though Raja's performance in the film is far superior to Appu's. Appu is the obsession of a writer.

Now that you've experimented with both the mediums, which one would you say is easier — acting or writing?
Acting is certainly easier. Writing is a very difficult and a lonely process. An actor has many crutches but not the writer. This is also because I've never had a formal schooling. My writer friends don't sympathise with my complex however. They tell me that I'm a show off, and indulge in false humility. Actually, this has to be understood in a larger perspective. I started writing as a hobby... because I wanted to express myself. I was working as an assistant to a director (K. Balachander) who's first a writer and then a director. Balachander Sir encouraged me to express my thoughts on paper. I was only 18 at that time, but he took me on as his co-writer. So often he'd tell the cameraman, 'Let him take the shot. He knows the scene better than me.' My copies even today have a lot of spelling and grammatical errors but this has never bothered me, because words are mere symbols.

If that was the case, why did it take you so long to launch yourself as a scriptwriter?
There was a phase in between when I didn't write at all. The few scripts I did, I chucked away because I lost interest midway. Or because I felt they were not good enough. Somebody else picked up these ideas and made them into superhits. They added, of course, but the original idea was mine. After about five to six anonymous hits, I got the confidence to pen my own scripts. *Raja Parvai* was a thunderous flop at the box office. My co-producer and I had overestimated ourselves, taking on departments like distribution and exhibition we knew nothing about. The colossal loss was a slap to our ego. Totally fed up, I gave up writing scripts once again and switched to writing fiction. I

wrote a thriller. It was serialised in a magazine for 36 weeks. Full of graphic violence, the story was so gruesome that Balachander Sir rejected it outright. After a while, I lost interest in writing short stories as well.

Have you ever thought of writing an autobiography?
No. To write an autobiography I'll have to lie and the kind of truths I know will hurt too many people. Exposing so many people is vanity. I might do it some time later, but not now. I'm not ready for it as yet.

You started as a technician, then dancer, then actor, producer and writer. What next?
I have to become a director. I should have directed a film 10 years ago. According to my friends I'm overdue by almost 20 years.

So what's delaying the process?
Avarice. I want more money. If I were to become a director I'll not make as much money as I do as an actor. People think it's the fear of failure that's making me delay the decision. It's not.

Isn't that a contradiction? A while ago you said corruption lies in the touch of money.
You're right it's a contradiction. If I pursue direction with deprivation, chances of my becoming corrupt are greater. The urge for money is that much stronger. Just now I have the right amount of money to lead a comfortable life. Doing only one film at a time is letting go off a lot of luxuries. Compared to the other actors who do a number of films, I've made a lot of sacrifices. My getting into direction is a matter of time.

Will wife Sarika be starring in the project as well?
If there's a deserving script and an adequate role, she must. I know she'll not agree unless it's a role she believes in. Her strength as an actress is that she'll never agree unless she's convinced about the script.

What is your strength as an actor?
The success of any actor not just me is that he is aware of the ambience of a script. That's the only way to maintain a healthy relationship with the character. I'm slowly coming to a stage where I'm running out of people who can disagree

with me. If they are wrong, so am I. The arguments continue and resolutions come in the process. Today, everybody is an all-rounder, a Kishore Kumar! These are times of general practitioners, not specialists. I think I have yet to prove myself as a producer.

And your weakness?
Millions. But I will wait for my critics to spell them out. Some of them, I'm willing to rectify. Some, I will not. Though I pretend to be organised, I am not. Like most successful men, I have all the trappings of punctuality but it is restricted to checking the wristwatch for an appointment. I'm improving though. Until I was 21, I never respected appointments. I've lost count of the number of times I've missed my flights. I've jumped off aircrafts while they were rolling up ladders. I think I did this because I had all the time in the world. Today, I don't.

Would you say you are a better human being today?
I'm willing to learn and if there's a strong person who will say that, 'I know and I will show you the direction', I'm willing to follow. The reason I'm not highly religious or political is because there is no leader who I could faithfully follow.

Looking back would you say life has been kind to you?
Very kind. I have regrets but it doesn't matter. My father wanted me to do IAS and when I went to Mussorie recently it gave me immense happiness to be a part of the campus. I even sought permission for enrolling myself in the course but in India we don't have such facilities. I also regret not going to the Pune Film Institute and learning formal acting. If I had, I wouldn't be floundering in my scenes as I do now. Next month I'm going to USA, I might enroll myself in a scriptwriting course.

Would you say you are happy?
Almost. I'm not the happy kind. I'll never settle down for happiness.

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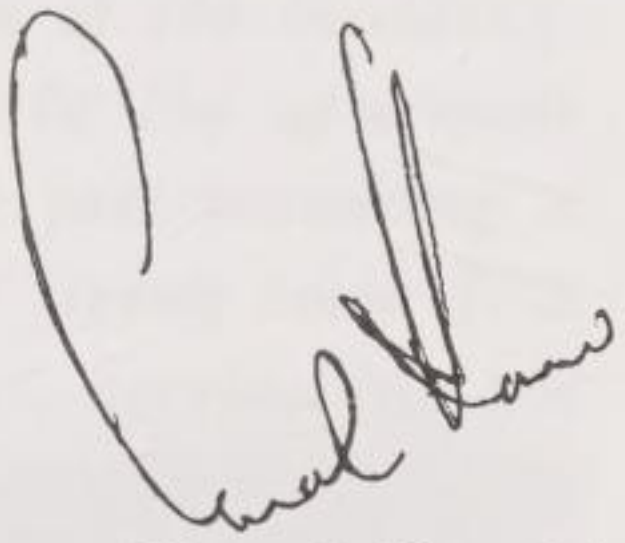
'In interviews, stars sometimes speak in a way that does not sound right in print. Some writers make the adequate corrections, thereby contributing to the quality of the

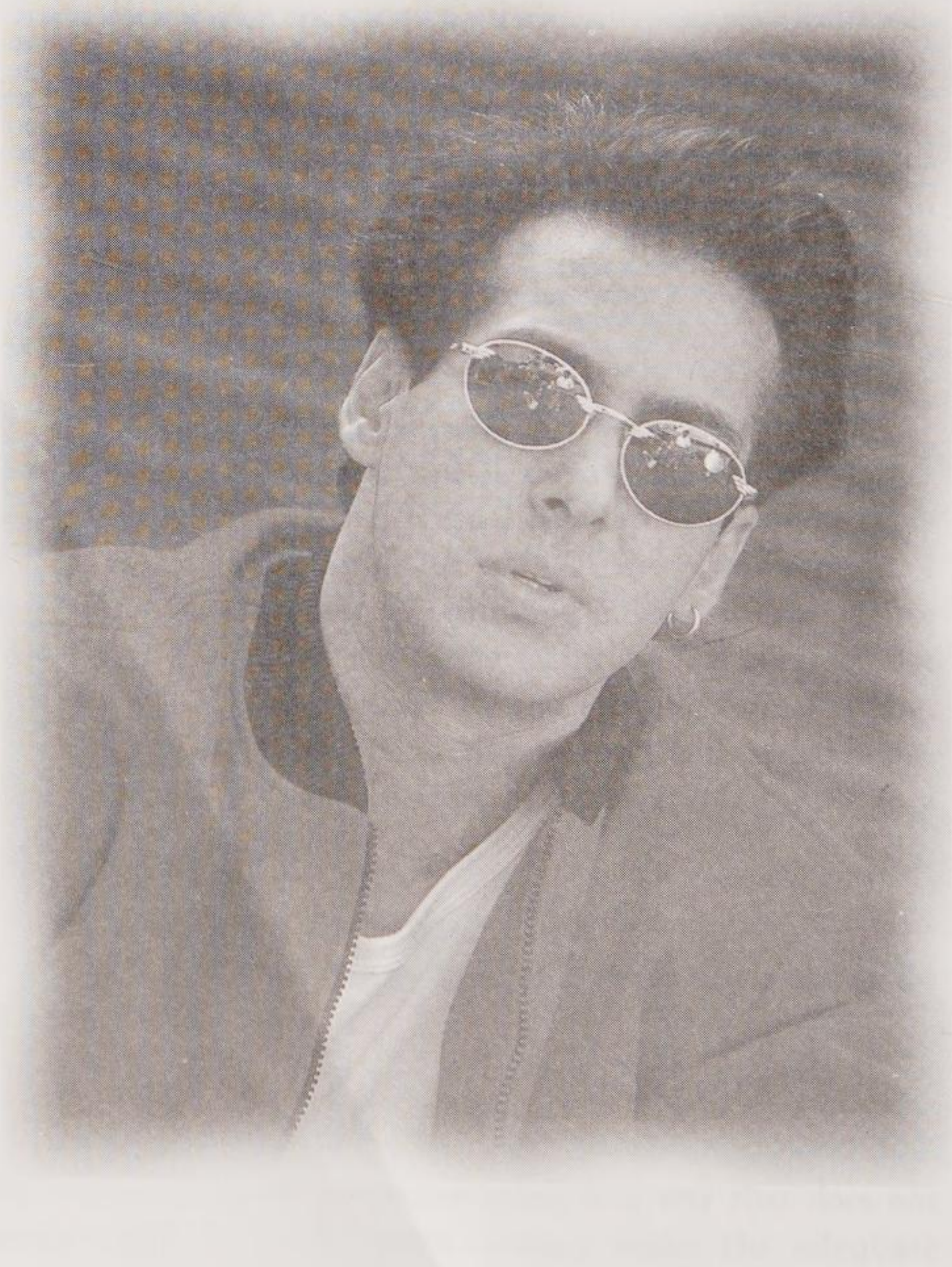
interview. Those who don't, make us feel embarrassed. There is a third category. Interviewers who prefer to write articles based on their imagination. As a rule, all interviews are meant for effect. That's the way it should be. Celebrities should preserve a side to them that is not for public. Over the years, I have mastered the golden blend where I don't lie, but don't tell the complete truth either. In the bargain, I beat around the bush... There are contradictions. But that's how one grows. I've never regretted any of my statements. My earlier interviews were boastful. Not anymore. I say what I mean even if it involves walking over a few corns.'



(Kamal Haasan)

1996

SALMAN KHAN



You ring the bell and a servant lets you in with a customary 'adaab.' *Salman Khan meets you halfway and offers a firm handshake. You walk inside the living room and meet his father, Salim Khan, who as always is at his wit's end. Two or three producers wait for dates and discussions. Younger brothers Sohail, (in shorts and gelled back hair, mobile phone stuffed in his pocket) and Arbaaz, (in long hair and jeans) walk in and out of the room. It's a house without formalities. And without rules. The kitchen works overtime. I'm told that at any time about 40 people are always present for lunch. And this excludes half a dozen servants and the watchman of the building. Friends and friends of friends drop by in the afternoon and stay for hours, playing Scrabble or just watching a film. The balcony at the far end of the living room is a family favourite. We sit on the low sofas, overlooking the Bandstand sea and order tea. 'Glass* mein lana, *cup* mein nahin,' *Salman tells the boy. Then turning to me adds, 'Somehow I don't feel satisfied if I have it from a cup.' The interview takes longer than intended because Salman is a brilliant raconteur. He has me in splits. From time to time, we have an audience (a friend from London, his dress designer and a photographer friend). I had gone to meet him with a lot of reservations, but he broke all my defences. If you don't believe me, read on and make your own impressions.*

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Do you identify with the image you have in print today?
No, I don't. But I don't blame the press for writing what they do because that's how I am with them. I really don't care about these things. If a person can for a few quotes concoct lies and play havoc with me and my family's peace of mind, they are not worth it.

If you realise a part of the blame lies with you. Why can't you try to rectify the same?
I don't want to. I've survived without them all these years and I can continue to do so. I don't want any bargaining in relationships. This is not a barter system where you do this, and somebody gets an advertisement. Or you do something else, and in return you're given an award. I don't want rewards from the press. I don't want any platforms. My work speaks for me. I don't have to.

Just for the record, what exactly went wrong in your relationship with the press? How and why did the rot set in?

It's so long ago, that it's almost impossible to go back in a chronological order, but let me try. It was immediately after the release of *Patthar Ke Phool*. It was the *mahurat* of my new film *Sangdil Sanam* and there was this usual rush for pictures. Suddenly, while we were all posing for the stills, one of the senior photographers said, '*Ye apne aapko* Amitabh Bachchan *samajhta hai, isko nikalo*'. Everyone was stunned. I moved away. The photographer's wrath was directed at me, because earlier I had refused to pose with Rekha for him when he visited our shooting of *Biwi Ho To Aisi.* He felt that as a newcomer I had no right to have a mind of my own. I would have let go off the incident but a few days later, as I was driving home, I spotted Ketan Desai shooting an ad film (Four Square) with Jackie Shroff on the street outside my building. Naturally, I stopped to say hello. A bunch of photographers were hanging around. That particular photographer was there too. No sooner did he see me, than he made a condescending expression. Something just snapped within me. I grabbed his collar and would have hammered him, had my father not intervened.

Why do you resort to fisticuffs? What makes you so angry?

People's attitudes. I hadn't gone there with war on mind. Just because somebody is refused an interview or a photo session, must he turn so vicious? Do they have a right to be so patronising? On another occasion, a weekly tabloid sent their photographer on my sets. I was splashed with mud and was doing a difficult shot. When the photographer clicked, I looked at him and said 'Don't, not now' but he did it again. This time the director noticed it too and pulled him up. The whole thing was blown out of proportion and became a major issue. The editor of the paper preferred to believe the photographer's word against mine and so the war continues...

What about the journalists? Why did you stop talking to them?

I've met only a couple of them and most of the time the experience has been weird (smiles). It's not as if I don't give interviews at all. I've talked a couple of times to a couple of magazines, but I can't go on and on about myself every two months. What's there to say? Besides, I've exhausted all the

topics. I've talked about my career, my family. I've even talked about Helen aunty. They've written about my failures, my friends, even my girlfriends. I have nothing more to say, so I pleaded silence! They took affront and began attacking me in print. That really put me off and I said to hell with all of them!

So what made you give those occasional interviews?
Impulse. I believe in taking a chance. I get angry and fly off the handle. Then on a different occasion, somebody approaches me and I react differently. It depends on my frame of mind at that time. Remember that famous incident at a photographer's studio? I had merely gone to check out my girlfriend's costumes. I wasn't keen on interacting with anybody. I was sitting quietly in the room when this young reporter peeped into the door and sought permission to come in. Standing outside she said, 'If I come in, will you pour Thums Up over my head? This was completely uncalled for.

But you said she was very young?
Ha... Now don't take up for your tribe. Recently, another female reporter phoned and said that she wanted to meet me. I told her I don't want to meet the press, but she persisted, said she wanted only five minutes and was at my doorstep a few hours later. I didn't want to be rude and thought she would leave soon but she hung around. Next, I was shooting at Chandivali studio and somebody brought me a magazine with an article on me. As I began to read the contents, who do I see, but the same journalist. Walking behind Shilpa Shetty, our eyes met. I didn't need to read the story further. Looking directly at her, I shredded the magazine into pieces. I told her that by the time I tear the article completely, if she was not out of my sight, I will do the same to her. Ashen-faced, she fled the studio that very minute (laughs).

You seem to enjoy intimidating people.
I don't. These are impressions that have been exaggerated. I'm quite fun-loving actually, but the better side of me is not for the press. If I like somebody, I'll go out of my way to be nice to him. Most of the time I don't know what to say to people. I don't like making polite conversation.

Is that your self-image?
Yes... (smiles) I don't rub people up the wrong way unless

they provoke me. I'm good to some people and not good to several people (smiles). These people don't care about me nor do I about them. The feeling is mutual.

Are you trying to say that the negative stories about you in print don't affect you?
They do... even if it's only for a short while (looks serious). My family however gets more upset than me. I don't buy magazines, so occasions of such irritants are few. If I find them around me, I browse through them, but I don't have the patience to read articles on me or anybody else.

Have you ever tried analysing your recurring problem with the press?
(Looks thoughtful). My problem is I trust. I rise above deceit everytime I'm betrayed. I take a chance and give the benefit of the doubt. But everytime, I'm attacked again! It's happened so many times, but I'm still optimistic.

How many people agree with this theory?
All those who know me, the rest of them don't matter.

What about those who think you have an attitude problem?
Attitudes change in a jiffy. I can have these same people eating out of my hand if I want to. My problem is I don't.

Does reputation matter to you? How do you make a character study?
The first test of character according to me, is how dependent is the person at sustaining relationships. My staff has been with me ever since I started my career. If I was such an evil person, they would have deserted me long ago. And I would have no friends.

Do you?
I have very few, but very close friends. When I go for my shows abroad, I carry all of them everywhere. They all pay for their own tickets, to not be a burden on the sponsors, but we have a great holiday. Due to scarcity of rooms, half a dozen of us shack up in one room. Often, I'm left sleeping on the floor with a friend or brother kicking me at night. That's why I find stories about 'Salman Khan freaking on shows' very funny in print (chuckles). They couldn't be further from the truth.

Are stories about you being flippant on the sets and those where you've been irreverent towards your directors fabricated as well?

(Surprised) Is that what my work reflects on screen? I'm not ready to believe that my directors think I'm irreverent. I'm flighty but only for myself. I don't distract others. During *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun....! (HAHK)* Mohnish Behl felt that I wasn't concentrating sufficiently. I didn't think it was essential. There are certain roles where the actor has to let the script take over. *HAHK* was one such film. I know who is feeding you such tales. On the sets of *Khamoshi — The Musical*, Nana Patekar asked me to get serious, during a particular shot. I told him, 'That's what you are in the film for'. So what's wrong with that?

Isn't it strange that all your co-stars have had problems with you at some time or the other and none of your directors ever repeat you?

Sooraj Barjatya has repeated me. So has Lawrence D'Souza. Rakesh Roshan wanted me in his next film. So did Saawan Kumar Tak. I refused them. Even South director Suresh Krisna has taken me for *Love* and *Jagruti*. In seven years, how many more times can anybody repeat me? I don't agree that my co-stars have a problem with me. Aamir and I had no hassles during *Andaz Apna Apna (AAA)*. The controversies regarding comparisons between us was created by the media. If Ajay Devgan didn't do *Karan Arjun*, it had little to do with me and more to do with the director. If *AAA* would not have worked without my vibing with Aamir, *Karan Arjun* would not have worked without a tuning with my screen brother. At the onset, both of us agreed that unless we looked like brothers and shared a rapport, the film wouldn't work. We had absolutely no clashes, in fact, we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly during the outdoors. Nana Patekar cannot find me difficult because he is hundred times more unpredictable than I am and whenever he gave suggestions, I agreed wholeheartedly because I knew it was for the betterment of the film.

And the women?

Women? To begin at the beginning — Raveena Tandon. We were shooting some very happy and extroverted pictures for *Patthar Ke Phool*. To get into the mood, I was blowing chewing gum bubbles. Raveena took offence to this. I didn't

think I had done anything wrong but I decided to keep my distance (shrugs). For the next schedule, we were shooting outdoors and I realised that her fly was undone. Everyone noticed it but no one was willing to tell her. After a lot of conflict, I did. A few months later, we were shooting the climax of *Andaz Apna Apna*. In a scene involving the four of us, we had to go through a lot of retakes. When finally the shot was okayed, without looking at anyone, I said, 'one more'. 'Why one more?' she demanded aggressively. 'Because,' I had to tell her, 'Your skirt flew up. If you don't mind, it's okay with me.' Next, we had a brush in South Africa but now finally it has all been sorted out.

What about the others?

None of the others have had a problem with me. Not Bhagyashree. Not Karisma. And not Madhuri Dixit.

And Manisha Koirala?

See, I had the same problems with Manisha as everybody else. I may have upset her, but she doesn't hold it against me. As for Mamta Kulkarni, she initiated most of the trouble. We were shooting the *'Bhangra pale...'* dance in the biting cold of Kulu Manali. The dance director had knocked the daylights out of us heroes, with unending rehearsals. We were on a 100-day outdoor schedule. Suddenly, we realised that Mamta Kulkarni, also a part of the dance was not rehearsing. When we inquired, we learnt that she had finished the rehearsal and would be shooting directly the next day. I lost my head! Here we were suffering in the cold and madam had announced that she didn't need rehearsals. I told the dance director that we had perfected our steps and promised him a first take okay. If Mamta didn't get it in the first take, I warned him, I would not give a second take. And I meant that.

Did she?

Of course, not. And the way she asked for the retake (he imitates her) was so funny that instead of getting angry I burst out laughing. Two, three, similar incidents followed. One day a beehive erupted on the sets and there was chaos. The cameraman tried pushing me under his black cloth for protection, but on noticing that Mamta was under it, I stomped out. I said, *'Mujhe madhu makhi chalegi*, Mamta *nahin*' (guffaws). Next, there was a stone throwing incident

amongst villagers and the women folk on the set needed protection. Mamta and I made up on the last day of the shooting, when she sent me a very sweet note of apology. It was a very sincere gesture. I dropped my defences and invited her over for Eid.

It is said, you have a weird sense of humour. You derive sinister pleasure when someone is in pain.
(Frowns) Most of the people see injustice on the road and drive away. I stop every time (pauses). People get this impression because I maintain my humour even in the depths of a crisis. That's why they tend to feel I'm insensitive. Let me give you an example. Once Sangeeta Bijlani and I were driving to town, in my old convertible. On the way, near Mahalakshmi, we saw an overturned motorbike. A large crowd stood surrounding the man but nobody did anything to help. I put the injured man in my car and drove him to my uncle, who's a doctor. My uncle was playing carrom. He fired me for getting involved in a police case. I got angry with my uncle for not helping. Anyhow, we rushed him to the hospital and after a lot of name dropping got him on the surgery bed. The man had suffered a brain haemorrhage. Somehow, they stitched him up. Looking back, it was all quite bizzare (rolls his eyes). In the middle of it, this unconscious man sprung up on his bed and said, 'Don't stitch me up. I'm scared of the needle' then fell unconscious again. In that knocked out state, I dropped him at his house at 5 a.m. And that's when I learnt that he was Jai Borade, my dance director of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun....!* I said 'Oh you? I had an appointment with you tomorrow but I'm glad to meet you today.' Later Sangeeta fired me for making light of the situation but what's wrong with that?

How do you look back on your relationship with Sangeeta?
I don't. There is no point in looking back (pause).

Considering you broke off and made up with her a hundred times, did you believe that it was finally over?
(Looks blank). You're right. We've fought and made up a number of times. I've hurt her often and she has suffered. But what is incredible is that for all the grievances, she is without any bitterness today. It's a special quality.

In case there is a possibility, would you consider a reconciliation?
I'm happy with my girlfriend. Besides, I'm committed to her.

Do you think Azharuddin is committed to Sangeeta?
Let me tell you, Sangeeta is a very sensible girl. She is level-headed and calm. During our courtship, I always depended on her for advice. I'll believe it as truth only when she issues a statement. She is the best judge.

If you are so reasonable, what drives women you're involved with, to attack you in print? Do you feel exploited?
None of them are so smart to exploit me. They get talked into purposeless interviews. I agree that from Shaheen to Somy, all have abused me in print. But have I ever attacked anyone of them?

What makes women who are involved with so insecure?
I don't know... At some stage it's the women who make me insecure. Maybe my not accepting them publicly...? Maybe my stalling for more time...? I tell them I will accept them when I'm ready. I don't blame their impatience, I'm at fault. But to say that I'm not consistent, is not fair. Five years with Shaheen, eight years with Sangeeta and four years with Somy is not a short time.

So do you accept you are involved with Somy Ali?
(Hits his forehead). Look she is too young and quite innocent. I don't want to drag her into all this...(looks embarrassed) Can we talk about something else, please?

At one stage you wanted to become a writer.
I've given two story ideas so far. *Baaghi* was successful, *Chandramukhi* misfired. Now, I'm thinking about getting into direction. But first my brother Sohail has to make his debut. There's no time limit for film-making like acting. I can direct a film even when I'm 60.

Both your brothers have had a comparatively late start. What if they don't make it?
They will. I've seen Arbaaz in *Daraar* and he has a presence that cannot be missed. As for Sohail, he is a lethal

combination of maturity and childishness that makes a good director. As an actor, I can clearly sense their potential.

What do you look for in a role today?
Only two kinds of roles turn me on today. There should be a goal or the hero should be selfless. In the olden days, could you ever think of Dilip Kumar passing on the road and a man shouting 'Ai Dillu...' I don't want my fans to ever refer to me as 'Ai Sallu...' I'm not against being approachable but the older stars, even when they played *taporis* on screen commanded a certain respect. Today, the star projection is casual and the media is responsible for it. The press played a different role then. Have you ever seen a picture of Dilip Kumar clasping Meena Kumari in an embrace other than in a film still? Go to any auditorium and you will see that the audience heralds a rape scene. Isn't it a shame? The damage has been done.

A lot of damage has been done to your image because you refused to communicate with the press. Do you regret the decision?
The fan who buys a ticket for my film does not do it on the basis of an interview. As for photo sessions, I believe that the less they see of me, the more I could gain. I'm fed up of seeing the same poses and reading the same quotes of actors month after month. No matter how good-looking the star, people get fed up.

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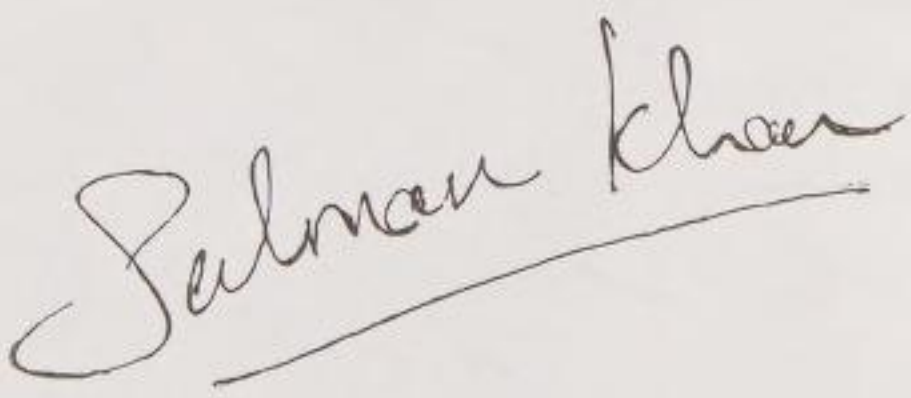
'I don't know what made me speak considering I don't talk to film journalists. The interview reflects what I am, and I don't regret a single answer.'



(Salman Khan)

1996

BASU BHATTACHARYA

Beginning with Teesri Kasam *('66), the story of a* nautanki *dancer who gets attracted to a bullock-cart driver, all Basu Bhattacharya films reflect a complex study of man-woman relationships including the unpopular ones like* Uski Kahani *('66),* Tumhara Kaloo *('75) and* Madhu Malati *('78). Bhattacharya sprung into the news with* Anubhav *('71) (starring Sanjeev Kumar and Tanuja).* Aaviskar *('73) with the hit pair Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore brought him into the limelight, while* Grihapravesh *('79) dealing with extramarital relationship completed the trilogy on marriage. His experiments with subjects outside marriage included* Anveshan *('88) a teenager's experience of rural problems from an urban perspective, besides few other unreleased films like* Anand Mahal *and* Asamapt Kavita. *His forte however was marriage and the prodigal returned to his old favourite in* Panchvati *('90) telling of the restlessness of a mismatched couple. Now, after a gap of almost 10 years,* Basu*da is ready to attack the institution of marriage again with his bold bilingual* Aastha. *Titled* The Prison Of Spring *in English, the film is about a housewife who is lured into prostitution for economic independence.*

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You've mentioned somewhere that Aastha ***is inspired from a real life incident.***

That's right. About 20 years ago, I had gone shoe-shopping with my daughter to Linking Road, Bandra. At the entrance, on the doorman's chair, a very petite but beautiful woman sat self-consciously. Clad in a simple cotton saree, she looked a regular housewife, except that there was something very striking about her. While I was browsing through the shoe racks, I overheard her asking for the same size of shoes as my daughter's. In a way, that's what got me interested in her. Priced at Rs. 21, the lady was bargaining with the salesman to give it to her for Rs. 17. When he disagreed, she compromised for Rs. 19. 'I'll save on the bus ride and go home walking, but I cannot afford any more.' I was at the cash counter and just thinking of paying the balance amount for her, when another elderly lady, dressed gaudily, got up from her chair and demanded that the shoes be packed for the younger lady. Completely foxed, the housewife protested,

but the older woman was too overpowering and warded off the younger woman's protests. Intrigued, I deliberately waited outside the shop for a while, to find out what would happen next. The two women emerged out of the shop. The older woman had her arm on the younger one and I distinctly heard her say, 'Of what use is such beauty if it cannot get you a pair of shoes...? Spend an afternoon with me and I'll drop you home a richer woman...' The words haunted me and I often wondered what could have happened to that woman...

What makes you think that the woman took to prostitution? She could have taken the older woman home to pay her the balance amount.

She could have... but by now one is a good judge of people and situations. In the manner the older woman was dressed with red lipstick and synthetic *salwar kameez*, it was easy to see that she was a procuress. The younger woman was too simple and domesticated to initiate social interaction. Weighed down with the burden of two cloth bags holding vegetables, she became an easy victim.

Then what happened?

I saw the two drive away in a taxi and it's a image I've not been able to get out of my mind. *Aastha* is the story of what could have happened to that woman. The five-star ambience is my addition. A woman like Mansi would need more than ordinary surroundings to be seduced. And that is the reason even for my choice of her client, Navin Nischol. He is the sober man, who prefers domestic women.

By concentrating on an isolated family you have restricted the film from raising a bigger issue.

My films have never been about raising an issue. I've always concentrated on one couple. The hero is always Amar, the heroine is always Mansi. The stories are in a way continuing in all my films. The trouble is that our lives today are dominated by the consumerist culture. In the scene where the heroine is seduced by five-star luxury, her daughter is seduced by adventures of Esselworld and husband by the exotic ancient culture. The only difference being that, while he's enticed by the past, she is by the future. If the film had concentrated on other couples, it would have been a different story, not *Aastha*.

You seem to be obsessed with man-woman relationship. All your films concentrate on the institution of marriage. Comment.

That's true. If there were more films and literature available on marriage, there wouldn't be so many divorces. The man-woman relationship has been through a metamorphosis due to civilisation. But how strange that we concentrate so less on the institution and so much more on the by-product. My attempts to make films on the subject is to try and put the jigsaw puzzle together.

Isn't it strange that this should come from a man who couldn't make a success of his own marriage?

It is. I can convince so many people but I find it difficult to convince my wife. If she's determined to fight all the feminist problems through me, I cannot do anything about it. It's painful but this is life. The great social reformer, Vidyacharan, worked very hard at widow remarriages, but his own daughter was destined to be widowed thrice. So these things happen.

Were those explicit love scenes necessary?

They were, because prior to the incident, the wife has never experienced an orgasm. This is true of 90 per cent of Indian marriages, where men don't bother about satisfying their women. It's only after this encounter, that Mansi discovers the pleasures of her own body. Not to forget the tremendous guilt that she carries home.

The love scenes are unusually stark. What was your motive in projecting them so?

The message would have been lost without it. I'm aware that the critics are going to accuse me of commercialism. Probably, that's the reason the film is being liked and sold, but I have never done anything to elude my audience. All these allegations will disappear when they see the film. Rekha's performance breaks all defences.

Mansi's first seduction is unconvincing. It's difficult to accept that the character could be wooed into prostitution so easily.

Maybe not. Morality depends on situations too. I have taken cinematic licence, but the situation is not improbable. She is vulnerable and engulfed by her environment. The smell of the soap, the feel of a fresh towel, the opulence of five-star

culture is overpowering. This cannot happen to a Bombay girl. Mansi and Amar are from Allahabad.

So what is Mansi's quest? What is she in search of?
Quest? She has no quest. She was unaware of it, until she discovers quest. There is no search either. She has little and desires a little more. She tells her husband who is a professor at college to take up one more tuition, but when he explains that he doesn't want to give up his quality time for economic independence, she understands. Mansi has no demands, not even in bed. She isn't greedy for money either. Whatever she earns, she splurges on her loved ones.

Your films project you as a feminist. Are you?
Yes and no. Let me put it this way. I understand women. I don't believe in rigid chauvinism, just as I don't believe in rigid feminism. For centuries, women have been suppressed. It's like a boil on your skin and the boil bursts. In my life it burst in Rinki's outcry who took 100 years of suppression personally. I firmly believe that no decision is taken by men. It's women who take decisions. I don't know of any man who dominates his woman. It also isn't in the case of those men who give the impression of calling the shots. I grew up in a home where a lot of respect was given to and commanded by the womenfolk. Housekeeping and running an efficient kitchen is a special art. And those who can do it call the shots.

One notices that in all your films, the hero continues to remain self-absorbed.
It's like this. The man, due to exposure, tends to become corrupt. Comparatively, the woman has been able to safeguard herself being confined to the house. In not ruling the world, not dealing with hypocrisies, their ability to adjust is better preserved and are therefore survivors.

Would you say Aastha ***is a love story? Do you believe in love?***
Yes, I do. It happens all the time around you and you see love changing people's lives. Unfortunately, in arranged marriages, love and lovemaking don't go together. Are you aware that the majority of the Indian couples never undress before lovemaking? The act is as functional as going to the toilet — a mere release. A man can be satisfied by any woman, but a woman cannot be satisfied by any man. So,

Mansi may sleep with a lot of men, but loves only Amar. Yes, *Aastha* is a love story. There's a scene in the film where we talk about why tragedies like *Romeo and Juliet* cannot be a love story. My characters resolve their conflict.

The end is too abstract and offers no solution.

There is no solution. Maybe the couple will now lead a different life. Maybe they will confess, cry and tide over the past. Maybe the husband will accept and forgive. One thing is certain though, their behaviour pattern will be altered henceforth. I've deliberately left the end vague with just a hint of suspicion, because I want my audience to come out of the theatre thinking.

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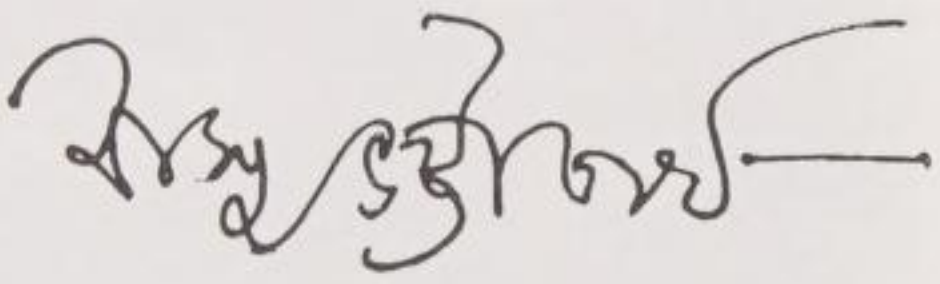
'I've often been asked why I make so many films on marriage. Perhaps because I went through a divorce myself, I want others to learn from my mistakes.'



(Basu Bhattacharya)

1997

SHARMILA TAGORE

She has just returned from a hard day's shooting. Even before she can take a breather, she is engulfed in her domestic chores. A pending problem with the driver, some last minute instructions for the cook and quality attention to daughter Saba. There's a business meeting in the house and by the time it concludes, Sharmila Tagore has hardly any time for a quick shower and change. 'I'm sending you the car at 8.00 p.m.' she tells me on the phone. At 8.15, seated opposite La Tagore, we talk about love, life, roles and relationships.

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Let's begin from the time you shifted to Delhi. How was it adjusting to the new city?

(Thinks) Delhi wasn't exactly a new city for me. I had been coming to the capital ever since my engagement and had a host of friends here. Also, a lot of my friends have shifted out of Bombay. Initially, when I was settling down, I did feel lonely. I felt it was a very protocol conscious city to be in but now when I'm 50 plus, I've become accustomed to my surroundings. I look at the positive side — Delhi has different seasons, different wardrobes and different phases of activities. My husband and the kids seem to like it here, perhaps because they have more space.

Didn't you miss Bombay's film industry and its razzle-dazzle?

Bombay and my career in films had reached a saturation point and it was wise to move out when the going was still good. I won't say I missed Bombay's razzle-dazzle, but I did miss its efficiency and sincerity. Delhi has its own unique pace. Now of course, things are changing. The Delhi traffic is becoming increasingly hectic and dangerous. Where earlier one covered distances in minutes, today it takes much longer. I think every city has its own charm. If Bombay has films, Delhi has politics and gardens, Calcutta has culture and fish. For a person familiar with all the three cities, Calcutta is the friendliest. Also, the most traditional. Bombay is more Westernised. Delhi is more ethnic. Shopping is more interesting in Delhi or let me put it this way, I prefer shopping in Delhi. One gets better *salwar* suits in Delhi, but better *cholis* in Bombay. Again old Delhi is very different from New Delhi. Like North Bombay is very different from South Bombay. Old Delhi has residents of

three generations and is therefore not nouveau riche. Comparatively, New Delhi is more flamboyant and aggressive.

You are not in touch with anybody from the film industry...

Nobody except my family. When I feel like it, I do pick up the phone and talk to Aruna Raje, Gulzar, Basu*da* (Bhattacharya), Sachin Bhowmick, Shakti*da* (Samanta). Earlier whenever I came to Bombay, I made it a point to meet all of them. Then after a while it got too much. The trips became shorter and the distances were too vast and the traffic unbearable. Besides, I was staying at Versova with my son and daughter-in-law and travelling to town was becoming an ordeal. Now, once again, I'm at the phase when I feel like reviving contacts. I feel like meeting old colleagues. I guess this is because I'm suddenly watching a lot of Hindi films and feeling nostalgic. Suddenly, I find an excess energy in me and feel the need to channelise. The contacts are all there. I don't have to tap them for reassurance.

What's your image like in Delhi? People brand you as a high-flying socialite.

One, I don't think being a high-flying socialite is all that bad. You cannot expect a fish to fly. I'd say I'm gregarious, like talking and listening to people. I enjoy people. I'm curious. Not for vested interests, but for wanting a glimpse into their varied lives. When I'm driving I like to look out. I enjoy interaction. Tiger is not at all social. Out of the five places we're invited to, we say no to four. Tiger hates going out and I don't blame him. When in Bombay, we seldom moved out because after a tired day's work, travelling to the suburbs was not worth it. Besides, people served dinner so late. In Delhi, dinner is served before midnight. But even then I have to literally push and prod my husband before he will agree. He doesn't mind going out if it's going to be a small group, amidst close friends. On those rare occasions, he enjoys himself and even lets his hair down.

How do you look back on the last decade? How fruitful have the years been for you personally?

They've been productive. I have gained a level of real confidence. I'm more me now. Earlier, I was not so sure of myself — I needed constant endorsement. Not any more.

Every experience, no matter how insignificant, teaches you something. When Tiger was campaigning for the elections, it was not just politics, but the entire process — travelling and the various interactions involved that were enriching. Talking to the villagers in the interiors, one learnt that all that a constituency wants is water, road and electricity. They want safety and security. It depends on how you absorb these experiences. I've done many crazy things in my life. I've driven a motorbike, flung things in a fit of temper, but I don't regret anything. In fact, I look back on them with amusement.

Don't you miss the arc lights?

Strangely no. As long as I was there, I enjoyed doing what I did. I quit because at that time it was the most sensible thing to do. I believe life should be lived on levels — there is a time and place for everything. Stardom was great as long as it lasted but there is more to life than just a career. I'm of the opinion that your values are determined by the time you are in your teens. I never wanted to be an actress. It just happened. I wanted to be a painter or a dancer but Satyajit Ray hijacked me, gave me the taste of films. I had never imagined myself without a husband, so marriage was always on the cards for me. My goal was never an individual goal. It was a family goal. Marriage with Tiger had gone through many highs and lows. It takes 15 years to know a man. Earlier there was more passion in the relationship. Today, there's more tranquility. Those days if I fought with Tiger, I had to make up immediately because if I didn't I suffered immensely. Today, when I disagree, I'm not willing to make up unless the conflict is resolved at the grass roots. At the age and stage I am, one strives for more meaningful relationships.

Is it possible to share all your anxieties with a partner?

It's next to impossible. Neither for him, nor me. Certain anxieties take a long time to comprehend, leave alone expressing them. Certain anxieties are better shared with colleagues. When Robi Ghosh whom I've worked with died recently, I felt saddened. We weren't in touch regularly but I missed his presence. Tiger knew him too but somehow talking about it to certain colleagues who had worked with both of us and could recall all the fun things we did together was more comforting than sharing the loss with Tiger.

Would you say you're a good wife? Once upon a time you were very jealous and possessive.

I'm okay. What's a good wife in any case? Or for that matter what is a wife? I need a wife (laughs). I'm sensitive. I'm perceptive and I make an effort — that's if I'm not too exhausted. Of late, I'm learning to pamper myself. I'm not out to win a popularity contest. In the past when I couldn't cope or felt I wasn't up to the mark, I felt diffident, weepy. Now I stop, observe, learn and get on with life. Earlier, I looked upon every mistake as an inadequacy. Now if there are failings, I don't allow it to affect my self-worth.

What's the experience of shooting all those ad films with your husband? Is he an easy co-star?

The 'Gwalior Suitings' and the 'Basmati Rice' ad? Oh it was great fun. Tiger liked being fussed over by my hairdresser Meena. She pampered him thoroughly even if it meant ignoring me in the bargain. It was a new experience for him but he was very cool as usual, laidback. I had my usual hang-ups of timing and mood. Our main problem was that both of us share the same side of our faces as our better profile. As a result there was an eternal conflict while shooting close-ups. He did whatever he was told and I'd be more fussy. That made him impatient. Actually, none of the men in Tiger's family have ever done a nine-to-five job. They didn't need to. I did, so did my father. To think of it, Saif is the first male in the family to work round-the-clock.

Does Saif consult you about his career?

No... I don't think children 'after a certain age need advice. They need support. A sounding board. Every generation is faster and more independent than the previous one. They need to grow up on their own, break away from old ties and define their own personalities.

Not when they are going through serious career conflicts. Film-makers complain that Saif, of late, has been unfocussed.

I haven't sensed that. This is something he wants more than anything else in the world. So, sometimes perhaps he becomes a little hyper or over-anxious and tires himself out in the process. He is young and sensitive. I think he will be all right. You remember what people said about me once upon a time.

How do you react to the recurring rumours of his marriage being on the rocks. Do you sense any tension?

I'm very fond of Dingy and I hope our relationship is independent of Saif. No matter what the outcome between the two, I'll still have a relationship with her. Ours is not the formal *saas-bahu-rishta*. She has been very straightforward with me and I hope she can say the same about me. I don't sense any serious tension between them. Saif can be naughty but he is not devious. When it comes to real values, he is extremely thoughtful and supportive. I think he is going through a phase when the actor in him has begun to ask a lot of questions. He is anxious and he needs to channelise his energies. He has a good memory and is capable of varied expressions. It doesn't matter whether he makes it to the number one slot. He's on the right track. For me personally, his success in films, is not the ultimate. For him, it is.

Is it all that simple to detach yourself from your son just because he is married?

I'm not detached. I know they are alright and therefore not anxious. Out of deep love and affection for my son, I've decided to leave him alone. Whether or not I agree with what he does, the fact remains that he is my son. He is an adult, he has to rely on his thinking to make decisions and look after his family.

When you gave up films, was it your own decision?

I had begun to slow down my work when I decided to have Saif. I consciously stopped signing new films. I said no to *Khilona, Tere Mere Sapne, Haathi Mere Saathi*. My producers were surprised. They couldn't understand why I was refusing films even before I was pregnant. After Saif was born, I further cut down my assignments. I believe that life is all about options, about making choices and I chose my family over my career.

Would you mind if your daughters decide to join films?

Why should I? My main objection to Hindi films is that life stops at 30. In other professions, you grow with time. In films, the older you get the worse you are treated. All this can be very damaging to your psyche. It makes you very frustrated to have to play mother at a very young age and wear grey strands. All the important roles go to men. The women after 30 are only offered vamp's roles. It's sad but

that's the age when you are ready to express yourself... when you are not just a glamour doll. I'd prefer if they chose an academic career, a career with a lasting identity. I cannot force my opinion on them. At the moment, they don't show any inclination towards acting. I guess two actors in a family are enough.

How do you think the film industry remembers you? Would you feel shy watching An Evening In Paris ***today?***
My contemporaries, I think, have warm memories... there is goodwill for each other. How do they remember me? I don't know. I've never thought about this. No, I don't feel shy watching my old films. I did what was the order of the day at that time. How I wish though, through some computer miracle I could delete my horrendous bouffant and hairstyles. They look awful. I regret not listening to my film-makers at that time. Hrishi*da* would tell me, 'Rinku, trust me, you are looking very good without the backcombing. But I thought I knew better. It's the same with the current crop of heroines. You see them crying in close-ups and want to remove all the excess make-up and mascara. I saw Karisma Kapoor in *Raja Hindustani* and wanted to tell her, 'You have beautiful eyes — you don't need heavy eye make-up.' But there's no point. She's at that stage where she will do what she thinks is right.

Which of your working relationships have been learning experiences?
All of them. Asit Sen taught me about cameras. Shakti*da* taught me dancing. Shaking a leg was impossible until then. Sanjeev Kumar taught me dialogue delivery. He had a way of making the most impossible lines seem convincing. Shashi Kapoor taught me thoughtfulness towards junior artistes. Earlier, I'd grumble when there were shooting extensions. He taught me not to grudge these little inconveniences for it meant extra income for make-up men and technicians. It was such a noble thought. Gulzar taught me speech modulation — when and how to take pauses. He corrected my diction. Uttam Kumar taught me how to be innovative in a love scene. I was very uptight during *Anand Ashram*. He explained that the consciousness reflects in the body language. I learnt that acting is all about timing and dialogue delivery.

By your own admission, how good an actress are you? Which do you rate as your better performance?

I'd say I'm competent. I know what's expected of me. For certain roles, I'm very good. I'm not good at comedy. I think *Safar, Amar Prem, Satyakam, Devi* and *Aradhana* were my better performances. I remember how angry my other directors got when they learnt that I was playing a mother. They looked upon it as a threat to my sensuous image. Strangely, I was never worried. I knew it was the right decision.

Mahesh Bhatt says that actors feel demoralised when they cannot memorise their lines. Do you agree?

Always when artistes are learning their lines, the atmosphere is not helpful. Too much noise, etc. If I'm given a two-page dialogue on the sets and expected to learn it quickly, it's not going to happen. I cannot work miracles. Language is very important in Hindi films. The pelvic thrust may come and go, but eventually Hindi films are identified with the spoken word.

That reminds one of Mausam. ***Saif has given an interview somewhere that as a child he was embarrassed by your performance.***

Has he? I'm not aware of this. We've discussed *Mausam* a number of times but I never sensed any resentment. It's a performance I'm proud of and I was very excited about the film even though the disappointment began on the very first day. It was a 2.00 p.m. shift and I had been preparing for the scene since morning. Sanjeev Kumar came at 8.00 p.m. I was hopping mad and refused to talk to him. The next day I was shooting with him for *Faraar* and it was the same story. My irritaion towards him continued. Then a few days later, I saw *Aandhi* and my defences crumbled. He was so good that I decided to forgive him. There's no point in fighting with co-stars. It's better to change one's attitude. It affects one's work.

Which other roles have been exasperating?

They were taxing but not exasperating. I had very long lines to memorise in *Aavishkar*. Basu Bhattacharya's films are always very verbose. The film Saif was upset about was not *Mausam*, but *Aavishkar*. He was only six years old at that time and was very disturbed by the scene where Rajesh Khanna and I are on the bed with the baby in between us.

He couldn't figure out who this little creature was, lying next to his mother. I think scenes involving other children in the film, with me, bothered Saif.

What made you say 'yes' to Mississippi Masala ***after such a long break?***

New Delhi Times wasn't such a long time away. There was a gap of about five years. In between there were many offers but mostly negative roles, so I refused. I said yes to *Mississippi Masala* because I liked the way Mira (Nair) narrated the subject. The entire shooting was completed in one schedule in U.S. and another one at Uganda and it was by far the most enjoyable outdoor of my career. We were all put up at the Ramada Inn Hotel and everyday there was something exciting happening. The average age of the unit was 30. I was the oldest and therefore the agony aunt. Anybody who had a problem, landed in my room. There were tears, confessions, smoking behind locked doors and heartbreaks. Mine was the party room. Domestic that I am, I had stocked the room with sufficient food. There was music, books... I had even hired a video for a month.

Would you say your attitude to work had changed in the interim?

I would say I was far more relaxed. Earlier, when I was angry, I threw things. I'm still extremely impatient but if things are organised as they were during *Mississippi Masala*, I let myself float.

What's a day like in your life?

At the moment it's very hectic. I do fill my life with something or the other. When the girls were young, I involved myself in the Parent Teacher's Association. I was the President and had great fun doing up postcards and organising events. Then when my mother-in-law became ill, looking after her became a major task. She was determined not to go to the hospital and it meant hiring extra staff and reorganising routines, but it worked. When she expired, I had spent so much time with her, that I felt a vacuum. Then, in between this idea of converting our ancestral home in Pataudi into a conference centre came up. Doing up the hotel needed a lot of time and attention. When the hotel was ready, I devoted my attention to the garden. I bought relevant books and spent so much time with seeds and trees, that I turned into some sort of horticulturist. Now even the

garden is flourishing so much that they've thrown me out of the palace. Just when I thought, now what, *Aparajita*, my new play came and took over my life.

If you had a chance to reorganise your life, what would you like to change?

I'd like to direct a film. *Aparajita* has unbalanced me. When I was friends with Aruna Raje, I was attracted to direction. With passage of time, the passion faded or maybe was just suppressed. Now once again, the ardour is returning. Maybe even this is a passing phase. I believe in destiny. I wouldn't be where I am, had Ray not picked me up and after that had commercial films not happened. Maybe I would have lived anonymously or may be something else. Instinct tells you when something is going to happen. I've always known when I'm at a turning point.

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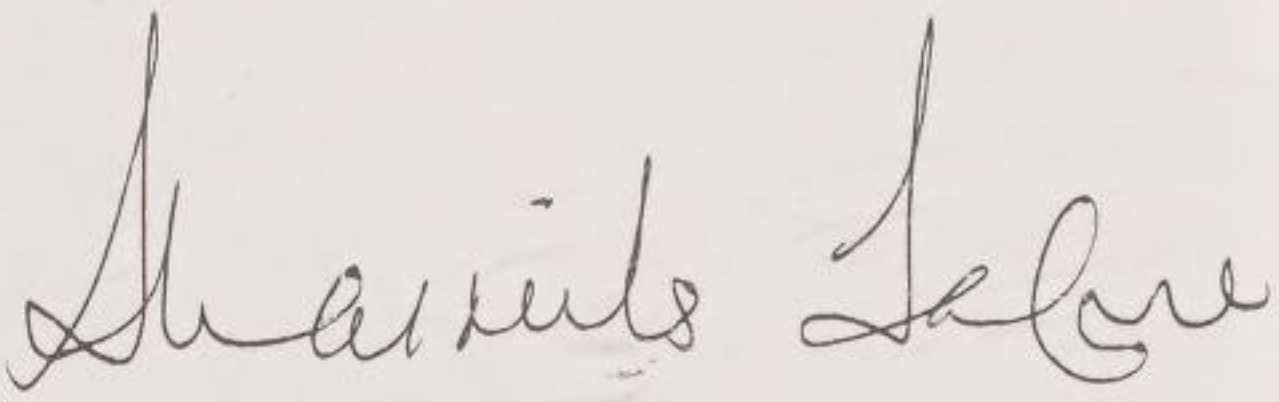
'It is a pleasure to be interviewed by the author because she has the knack of deftly drawing you out and gently guides you down memory lane. It is actually quite an enjoyable experience and what is even more satisfying is that she can translate the moment into print without it losing its magic.'



(Sharmila Tagore)

1997

JAYA BACHCHAN

This family does not follow the tradition of knocking the door before entering,' Jaya remarks mischievously as son Abhishek walks into the room and settles on the chair next to her's. As if to prove it, brother-in-law Bunty Bachchan and after a while, husband Amitabh stroll in equally casually and settle down. The plushly done up cabin is overflowing with people. Contrary to the vicious rumours floating in the city, the Bachchans are comfortable in their cosy nest. A cheerful Bunty narrates humorous anecdotes of veteran Ashok Kumar referring to Amitabh as a promising newcomer in a television interview... Amidst all this chaos, the mother and son have their private chatter. Abhishek tells his mother about what happened the previous evening. Jaya watching her son closely, reprimands him for clanging his spoon on the cup. The seniormost Bachchan in a sky blue jogging suit and matching cap is sleepily giving instructions to the operator.

It's tea break and laughter fills the room. Any time is party time for the Bachchans. Not an appropriate venue for an interview. We decide to meet a few days later. This time, in a more formal setting. At Rajkamal Studio, on the sets of Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa, *it's an unusually hot day. Jaya sheds some real tears, but recovers when the director calls 'Cut'. Back to her make-up room, the tiny bed is scattered with clothes, books, scripts, spectacle cases and pens. A fawn coloured hand towel bordered with lace, rests on the armchair. The dressing table is clustered with bottles and boxes while the vanity bag and a hand baggage rests on the floor covered with a* dhurrie. *A few instructions and a phone call to check if everything is all right at home and we're ready for the interview.*

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It's a month since you started shooting and the film is almost ready. How does it feel?

Everything has happened so quickly that it has to still sink in. The film has almost taken over my life this one month. The only other time I've worked at this speed on a film was during *Doosri Seeta*. Working on a film at a stretch definitely helps. How do I feel...? This is strange, but I feel as if I've never been off the studios. As if the huge gaps before and after *Silsila* don't exist. My family and staff, everyone is so natural. It's only the media that makes it so dramatic.

Will you miss the shooting when it's over?
Yes, I definitely will. There will be a vacuum for some time. I will miss the set. We've been spending eight to 10 hours everyday for almost a month.

In the interim any new insights as an actress?
When you are a performing artiste, there is a part of you that is always observing. That part never stopped. The process of absorbing, assimilating, never stopped. What's changed perhaps is that today, my reflexes are much slower. My movements are less hurried, maybe even the manner of speaking is different. The voice modulation, the pauses... the tone has definitely altered.

What about learning lines? Is it more difficult now?
I always hated those long dialogues — I didn't do it then, I don't do it now. Even earlier, I always improvised on my lines and delivered them the way they came to me naturally. In this film fortunately, I don't have such long lines.

What other changes?
I was more intolerant when I was younger. I'm more patient now, more understanding. I try and see things from the other person's perspective. That's my husband's influence. Today, I understand a producer's plight (a genuine producer, not a proposal maker) much more than I did in the past. I should, being a producer myself.

It's believed you were very temperamental in your heyday?
(Laughs) I didn't throw tantrums. But yes, I spoke my mind and that intimidated people. I wasn't brazen with all of them. With those whom I liked, I was courteous. With those I saw through, I was a firebrand. It's because I hate liars and hypocrites.

Are you suggesting that you were uncooperative with those you disapproved of?
No, no. I didn't cancel dates or make them suffer losses, but if I was asked to do a scene that was ridiculous or mouth lines that made little sense, I'd refuse. Something like what Kajol is today. She is not unprofessional. She is herself, undiplomatic, brazen. If the director/writer was able to convince me of the most ridiculous scenes, I'd surrender. The protest was never due to my ego. It was due to my exasperation.

Journalists said that when unwilling, you were outright offensive.

That I'm even today. I never cared for names or banners, if I didn't like something or someone, I said so. My reactions have always been impulsive. I think what happened was unlike Hema Malini and later Sridevi, I never had a buffer. My family never gave interviews on my behalf. And since I didn't have a mother or an aunt to ward off journalists, I had to do it myself. It's only natural that there were times when I was rude and was often hit in the bargain.

How would you describe your relationship with the press today?

I think I have a healthy relationship with the press. Despite the recurring conflicts, I feel they understand us stars. I hope they do. My reactions to them are completely impulsive. If I'm in a good mood, have performed a scene well, then I can even talk to a warring reporter. The next day, if he drops on my sets again, expecting the peace to become a lasting relationship, I can shock him by ignoring him completely. My actions are not calculative. Sometimes, even I don't know how I'll react.

How do you deal with them asking so many personal questions?

I lose respect for the person asking me personal questions. An actor and a scribe's communication is based on the foundation of profession. They have all the right to ask us questions about our work, but not our private life.

Not even when contrary rumours persist?

Celebrities don't owe explanations to journalists. If there are stars who enjoy giving blow-by-blow account of their lives to magazines, it's their choice, but you can't have a blanket rule in all cases.

What about instances when stars themselves give quotes that can be misinterpreted?

For example.

Sometime ago you gave an interview where you've said, 'I don't play second fiddle to my husband in reel or real life'.

So what's wrong with that? There are times the husband plays second fiddle and there are times, the wife does. That's marriage. How the reader or writer perceive the quote is up

to them. If they have mischief on mind, or have a one-track mind, I cannot help it.

Do you feel you've had to often bear the cross for being Mrs. Bachchan?

I don't attach too much importance to all this. When journalists irritate me asking too many questions about my husband, I tell them, ask him. Why me?

Do you feel undermined because of his overpowering image?

I don't take all this seriously. It's our personal equation. I don't need to shout our personal equation from the rooftops. I don't need medals and certificates from outsiders.

What are your concerns today?

The new breed concerns me. We have to think about what we are imparting to our generation because it will be a part of history and therefore have a great responsibility. The youngsters today, feel that we know better because we've lived longer. That's not the only reason and we need to communicate this. We need to build bridges. To know their mind and feelings without being judgemental.

And as an actress?

As an actress it worries me that regional cinema is almost extinct today. Especially Bengali cinema where quality was equivalent to literature. It's because more and more project-oriented people are invading the film world. It's a sad and helpless situation.

What about the depiction of women on screen?

I'd say it's not so bad, it's improving. In fact, at present it's almost a parallel movement. While one section of cinema is still presenting her getting a raw deal, there is another cinema, where women are generating power. *Mrityudand* is a recent example. I feel women are rising above oppression.

Where does Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa ***fit in?***

Sujata of *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Ma*, despite being the conventional housewife is not so. She protests against her husband and children from within the confines of the home. That's her strength. A lot of women, I think will identify with Sujata.

Isn't it ironical that the actress who made her debut as Guddi ***in '73 should return as mother in '97?***
Isn't it natural? It's 25 years. Guddi has grown up. On-screen and off-screen, she is on her way to becoming a grandmother.

By choosing to return as a mother, haven't you limited your choices?
When I came into films, they said about me that, 'If she can, so can the others.' I took it as a backhanded compliment. Celluloid isn't just the prerogative of the bold and beautiful. The ordinary has its attraction too. I was attracted to acting and therefore joined the Film Institute, but I never planned my career. When I stopped, when I came back or now, they were always instinctive decisions.

Do you see yourself fitting into the regular commercial films?
Why not, as long as the role is well-defined. I'd hate to play an all-negative or an all-positive role. The message of the film has to be strong and well-meaning.

What about a sequel to Abhimaan?
The story was before the marriage, until the conflict. What's there left to say in the sequel? Also, at the rate these channels go on repeating the film, the magic has worn off.

What about a sequel to Silsila?
No. The film said all it had to.

In those years when you were not working, there must have been moments when the artiste in you clamoured for expression...
See, an artiste is used to channelising his energies. The expression does not have to be identical. Doesn't M.F. Husain paint horses, *devi* and also Madhuri Dixit? Similarly, I found an outlet in my home and children. Sometimes, I agree some roles aroused that feeling of deja vu. Most of the time they didn't. Sometimes, my husband would come home and describe his co-star's role as a typical Jaya Bhaduri role, adding, 'I missed her presence.' That was enough to reassure the artiste in me.

How do you keep the artiste in you tuned? Watching better films, books or observing people?
All of it. I travel a lot and therefore observe a lot. The artiste is always storing information for future use. I may not use it in the exact form or in an identical situation, but the sentiments linger. It's quite a complex and interesting process how an artiste's mind works.

Can you give an instance?
I'll try. Yesterday we shot this scene where the police have ransacked my deceased son's room. Director Govind Nihalani had discussed the shot with me, but I didn't know how I was going to do it. When it was time for shooting, I wasn't sure exactly how I was going to portray it. It was such a depressing set, a pall of gloom just overcame me. I felt so sad... When the shot was over, Govind asked me, how I did it. He wanted to know what I was thinking...

What were you?
I was thinking about my son. Thinking about all the times he spent in the room, touched his things. I began to touch those things, remembering him, resenting all these strangers just walking into his room and taking over his past. How a particular scene eventually comes across has a lot to do with the director.

What was the experience like working with Govind Nihalani?
Govind is very sensitive about not putting any pressure on his artistes. He provides you with a lot of space, but at the same time hangs around just in case you need him. He's very greedy about wanting the best and also very serious. He seldom smiles because he dislikes distractions. Of course, now we are changing all that. Of late, he has begun to laugh a lot on the sets.

Who are the directors you'd like to work with?
I haven't thought about it, but all the younger lot are good.

Of the earlier ones, who brought out the best in you?
Isn't it obvious? Gulzar and Hrishikesh Mukherjee.

Are you usually confident of your projection? Do you have any second thoughts?
I'm not a very unsure person. I don't dwell on matters for

too long. Therefore even as an actress, I'm very clear about reacting in the way I feel is right. If the director disagrees, I ask questions. My interpretation of the role does not have to match 100 per cent the director's interpretation. If we can come close to 90, the remaining 10 can be compensated with craftsmanship.

Any self-doubt when you see the final film?

So many... I'm over taken by self-doubt. I watch myself on screen and I cringe because I know everything could have been improved. I hate everything I've done. I find it all so predictable. It's a torture to watch yourself on screen. I'd say it's the worst part about being an actress.

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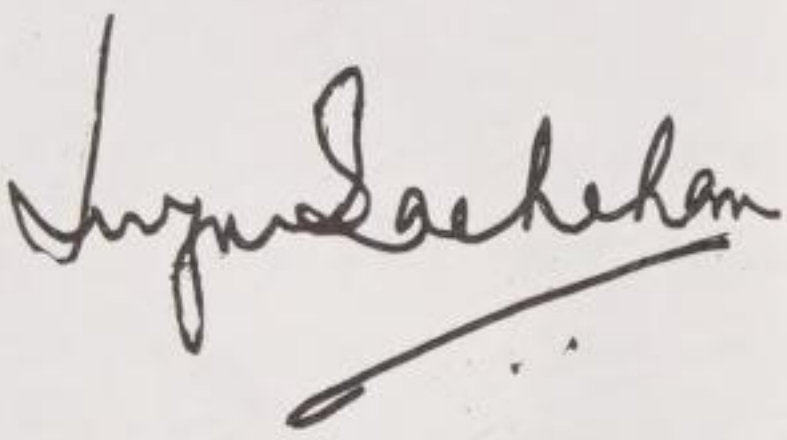
'There are times an actress feels like talking, going inwards and searching. She feels like defining her work, her thought process. This interview has captured one such moment.'



(Jaya Bachchan)

1997

KIRON KHER

The framing is perfect. The sun setting in a grey sky line and a blossoming peepul *tree quivering with thunder showers, threatening to get inside the drawing room window. Relaxing against the beige sofa set, hugging a red zari cushion, Kiron Kher is restless too.* Darmiyaan *is due for release soon and the actress is going through pre-release jitters. Blowing smoke rings in the air, Kiron orders yet another cup of tea. In the following interview, the actress discusses what went into playing such a complex role and how it affects the psyche of an actress.*

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Did you go through any conflict while agreeing to play an ageing actress? What made you say yes to the role?

For someone like me who has started out so late in her career, I wasn't looking for the run-of-the mill roles. In fact, what attracts me to *Darmiyaan* is that the character is past her prime. I find her complexities interesting. The kind of pain and anguish an actress goes through, an ordinary woman cannot identify or comprehend. The camera is cruel, tells the truth to a point of devastation. *Darmiyaan* is about this actress who cannot accept growing old. Her suffering, her psychosis are almost poignant.

What else is attractive about the character?

Little things about her — her flirtations and indulgences, even her flaws. She is a full-grown woman, but addressed as 'Baby' by the family. She falls in love with younger men and cannot take it when they leave her. She cannot accept that she is past her prime, has a child who isn't allowed to refer to her as a mother. The most attractive part of the film is its ambience — the film travels through decades... Tells you of the bygone glory — the black and white era and the magic it held. I was fascinated by the subject the first time I heard about it.

How do you work on your roles? Any special homework?

See, homework varies according to roles and films. Also, the homework may be more mental, at an unconscious level. Different roles demand different energy. *Sardari Begum* was much easier because it was a fragmented role, more natural. *Darmiyaan*, on the other hand, demanded heightened realism. Zeenat Begum is larger than life. I definitely don't know anybody like her in my personal life so fixating her on

a role model was out of question. What I've done therefore is an amalgamation of two or three similar images read or heard about over the years. All the *nakhras* I've projected are absorbed from the old Bengali actresses... The kiss-curls and the coquettishness. The matriarchal ambience was in the script. The *zenana* section calls the shots while the men are like drones. Zeenat Begum is very clearly a woman who thinks with her body. For all her superficiality, you scratch the surface and she is a woman who will fight for her last rupee.

So how do you relate to a character like that?
I don't identify with her but I feel compassion. I spent a lot of time understanding the subtext of the role and finally working out a character graph. It was easier because I was given the complete script, a rarity in Hindi films. The conflict was how to play her insanity. Her madness was the terrifying factor, because to me she's an extremist who even in crises can never be completely out of control. She can be drunk to the last bottle but hold her own. Her insanity had to be chilling because the seeds of disorder were sown during saner times. The distortions set in much later.

Were you nervous on your first day of shooting?
I was more anxious than nervous. I was far more nervous on the first day of *Sardari Begum*. Shyam Benegal was an unknown territory for me. His history of introducing the most supreme talent was intimidating and I was scared of letting him down. Not to mention, it was my first film. For *Darmiyaan*, I had been looking forward to the shooting. Fortunately, Kalpana began the film with the *mujra* and dance comes naturally to me, so I was comfortable. But something had to go wrong, so on the second day, during a vigorous dance movement, I developed a frozen shoulder. This scared everyone because we were shooting the *Holi* sequence the following week and it would have upset everyone's schedules.

By your own admission how professional are you?
I think I'm quite hyper. I cannot handle it when I'm the cause of delay. I don't like to keep people waiting. I'm far more comfortable if I'm waiting for people — the perfect situation would be when I'm ready with costume and make-up before time. This gives me an opportunity to run through my lines and absorb the atmosphere. Unfortunately however,

my role was such that the dressing up took ages. In the younger portion particularly, I had to wear elaborate hairdos and gaudy make-up. All the actresses in the olden days if you notice had wavy hair. There was no perming those days, but they brought the effect tying their hair into innumerable plaits, which they'd let lose the next morning. Bela *aapa*, my hairdresser for the film who worked with Meena Kumari in the olden days told me this. Isn't it amazing?

Did you at any stage feel disconnected with the role? Did you fantasize running away from the film?

Problems would crop up but they'd disappear just as quickly. No matter how enormous the physical or the emotional pressure of the role, I never fantasized running away from the film. From my play, yes, I feel like running away so often. Everytime we have our performance of *Saalgirah*, I tell Anupam why did I get into it? There have been instances when I've wanted to fled even as I was walking onto the stage. On stage, the nervousness is so overpowering that for the first five minutes, I cannot decipher my own words. Then through a fluke moment, the anxiety abates and gradually the play leads you. That's the magic of theatre.

And cinema?

Cinema has its individual equation. For the *Anarkali* scene in *Darmiyaan*, I knew I had to get my lines right in the first take because it was a very complicated shot. I had thought of several things I wanted to do in the scene, but at the time of the shot the pressure was so much that one wasn't able to project everything you felt. The helplessness about acting is that the camera is so sensitive that it even captures your thought process. When you are unsure it shows. Another scene, where I fall at Inder's feet and beg him to take me back, drained me completely. I was actually conscious of my body language altering when the shot was over.

What about the drunken scenes?

Those too. To see a woman so drunk is an ugly sight. I had swallowed gallons of salt water to get that bloated look — my eyes had to look puffed up. To emphasise the difference between the younger and the older portions, Kalpana has shot the older scenes from a very unflattering angle. The effect is poisonous. In any case, there's nothing more

desperate than an ageing actress trying to prove herself young.

Those who've seen the film describe it as a disturbing portrayal.
Is it? I wasn't disturbed. I'd say it was my chance to disturb others. I definitely didn't carry Zeenat Begum home. I left her where she belonged. On the sets. If I was ever depressed it's because I wasn't satisfied with my shot. Let's face it, this is perhaps the most unique role of a mother you'll get to see on the Indian screen.

Would you say you are a demanding actress?
I would like it if I'm emotionally stroked. If not, I can cope. Whenever you are doubted, you get defensive. The slightest suspicion from the director can demoralise an actress.

Is it important for you to externalise your thought process?
I like to interact, specially with Anupam. He has given me great inputs for the character. On the sets, I'd do it with my dress designer Simple Kapadia. She's a good sounding board, and has it in her to be a great support. I know that Dimple relied heavily on her for assessment of her performances.

Would you say you are a good actress?
I think so. I'd like to be better, specially in comedy. I think I'm not ready to make a fool of myself. If perhaps I let myself go, I'd be better. I have to learn not to take myself so seriously. My problem is I want full marks. I don't want to fail. In personal life, I don't mind criticism, but in my profession, I only want praise and adulation.

What have you gained or lost after becoming an actress?
I don't think I have lost anything as yet. I have a long way to go before I feel burnt out. Right now, the stomach is churning and much as it hurts, I like the feeling. I feel positive even about the problems, for I believe that whenever there is pain, something productive comes from it. With just two films, I've gained in confidence. Today, I can look directors in the eye and say, 'I'm good. Give me a chance.' In the past, I would have been shy.

But you asked Kalpana Lajmi to cast you in Darmiyaan?
That's true. I was drawn to the part ever since I read Tikku's interview in a magazine. I was fascinated with the idea and

wanted to make a film on it, or at least be a part of it. Then one evening, as Anupam and I were driving to a party, he told me that the subject was being made into a film by both Mahesh and Kalpana. Dimple was in the lead. A few months later, I learnt that Dimple was out and Amrita was in. Then Amrita got pregnant. Next, I met Kalpana at the Centenary year festival. I had earlier met Kalpana at Yash*ji*'s and also at Honey's home. I asked her what was happening to the project? She was low, said the film was jinxed and nobody wanted to do the role. I told her I was keen on it. She was positive, said she had seen *Saalgirah* and had in fact contemplated me as a potential lead. That's how it got started. Shah Rukh Khan got in, got out. And finally, Arif Zakaria got the role.

It's a very brave performance. What were you thinking about when you did all the degradation scenes?
This is very interesting. When you see all those cruel scenes, the viewer expects the performer to break down. Nothing of that sort happened. Call it my theatre background or the fact that I've always played very volatile, complex roles — roles of selfish, outrageous, flirtatious women. But playing Zeenat Begum did not lower my self-esteem.

How does your family deal with your new image? Are they resentful of you spending so much time out?
I'm still not a full-time working woman. I shoot about 10 days a month and the rest of the time, I'm functioning from home. I've refused so many teleserials with lead roles. If I had accepted them, yes, I'd have been very busy. But at the moment, I'm happy just doing my chat show on TV.

Your chat show reflects a distinct anxiety relating to teenage problems. Are you facing problems with your 16-year-old son Sikander?
I've always been an anxious mother — when Sikander was six and now when he is 16. The specific chat show you are referring to was about teenage problems. I spoke about my son because I believe that as an anchor, I have no right to expect complete honesty from my audience, unless I'm willing to expose myself as well. For a show to be successful, it has to be an equal equation. My problems with Sikander are nothing out of the ordinary than what most mothers go through when their children are growing up. You are forever scared if you are giving them the right guidance and values.

Critics feel that Kiron Today *is almost repetitive of your earlier show,* Purush Kshetra?
How can you say that? The latter dealt with gender discrimination. I moved to the former because I was looking for a broader framework. I had covered most of the topics relating to men and was feeling restricted. The only similarity in the two shows is the structure, but then I didn't want to do it differently. The other commonality of course, is me and I cannot help that.

With all the exposure and media attention, do you find yourself changing?
I think I've become a nicer person today. Maybe my domestic staff will not agree, for in the past few months, they've had to fend for themselves without any spoon-feeding. I'm still hyper but more willing to adjust and adapt. I've come to accept that creativity is made up of all kinds of people and one has to accept them with their strengths and idiosyncracies. That's what survival is all about. Things are not always going to be my way. I will have to adapt to my circumstances.

How did you feel on the last day of Darmiyaan?
Exhilarated. We were so happy to complete the film. And once again Kalpana had chosen a very appropriate scene for the finale—the opening scene where I'm signing autographs outside the Opera House theatre. The scene called for no histrionics, so I was relaxed, in short, having a blast.

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'The quality of any interview is always dependent on the questions asked by a journalist. Most of the time, the questions are a routine affair. Sadly, journos don't do sufficient research and are perhaps not fully acquainted with the craft of acting to ask relevant questions. This particular interview was a fulfilling exercise for me. The joy of a satisfactory performance becomes enhanced when an actress can clinically analyse her work. Sometime, talking about a role — in this case as complex as *Darmiyaan* — works as a cathartic experience.'

Kiron Kher.
(Kiron Kher)

1998

DEEPA MEHTA

Deepa Mehta was born in Punjab and all through her schooling in Dehradun and graduation at the Sri Ram College, remained an obsessive Hindi film buff. She saw the Suchitra Sen starrer, Mamta, *17 times and explicitly remembers every frame of the film. After several jobs, one of which even included selling tea on Bond Street, Deepa's search for an identity ended when the prodigal returned home to make documentary films. That's where she learnt all about the camera, sound and script.*

She began her career by writing scripts for children's films, gradually moving on to documentaries. Her first documentary film received an award at the Canadian film festival. In 1987 she directed Martha *for television, followed by* Ruth. *She has already been felicitated once as a film director at the Florence Film Festival. After* Sam and Me *and* Camilla, *Deepa is ready with her third and most controversial film,* Fire. *Recently in India for the casting of* Earth, *the second of the trilogy, Deepa held a private screening of* Fire. *The following interview was conducted after the screening.*

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What inspired you to make this film?

I had read a short story by Ismat Chugtai published in a magazine. It's about a little girl discovering her aunt and the maid servant under a quilt. Titled *Rajai*, the story is set in 1930 and explores this little child's awakening to sexuality. I felt the subject would make an interesting film. At that time, I even thought of weaving in the problems of an arranged marriage. Middle class anxieties appeal to me. I'm bored up of seeing films on the rural and the exotic side of India.

What appeals to you about the middle class?

That it is the moral guardian of society and yet on the brink of so many major changes. The middle class today has access to cellular phones, satellite TV — all this is opening avenues for them. A few years ago, a couple holding hands at Lodhi Gardens, Delhi, was unthinkable. Anyone doing it would be beleaguered by cat calls and whistles. Not anymore. Today, under every tree of those gardens, there is a couple romancing, but nobody bothers. I wanted to question preconceptions, wanted to capture this section of society.

What's your background in cinema. How did you get attracted to film-making?

I had a normal childhood and cinema was a part of growing up. We had a theatre near our home and every time I finished my homework, I would smuggle myself into the theatre. I've seen *Mamta* 17 times. My favourite scene in the film is when the older Suchitra Sen sees the younger one, for the first time, standing in the balcony upstairs. Also, the climax scene when she witnesses her daughter arguing in the courtroom. I was enthralled and wept each time I saw this scene. I became conscious about the power of cinema at a very young age.

You've captured the domestic life of a joint family with startling clarity. Have you grown up in one?

I grew up in a middle class, but not a joint family. I guess if you are observant, you can bring in the nuances. My job, as a director, is to paint a beautiful canvas. I'm always shopping for visuals — observing faces, body language and accents. It's easy for me because I'm incredibly curious. I have an insatiable appetite for people's lives. Perhaps, this reflects in my film.

You must be aware that the subject is controversial.

You'll be surprised, but I wasn't. If I was and had I thought about it on those lines, I would have perhaps not made the film. Where films are concerned, I'm so passionate that I'm almost illogical. I was so focussed on organising the finance and getting my act together, that I didn't even once stop to think about the implications.

If that is true, when did you first become conscious about the controversy?

After the film was ready and I was questioned about it at the premiere screening. I must admit that I was unprepared for the reactions. As Shabana Azmi has rightly summed it, some were outraged, some loved it and some hated it but nobody was indifferent. When I held the screening in India at the festival, everyone said that the censors would not permit the film. I think it's not fair to slot people without first giving them an opportunity.

Does it bother you that the critics are projecting it as a lesbian film?

Yes, and it's such a pity. The film is about various other

things — about choices, about double standards, about tradition, about gender discrimination. By focussing on this single point, it's the easiest way of not dealing with other issues that the film raises. It's a disturbing film for most of them.

Was it necessary to weave in mythology as a metaphor?
The Ram-Sita story is an integral part of my film. It's to emphasise that women have to prove their purity. I admire Sita for all that she went through. In the end, despite all the hardships and suffering, she is made to go through a trial by fire — Not because Ram, her husband suspects her, but for the reassurance of the public. My film questions the concept of duty. There is a dialogue in the film where Sita says that the concept of duty is overrated.

Do you think the film would have got as much focus if it hadn't starred Shabana Azmi?
I think the film would have suffered with a lesser actress. I think it's Shabana's performance, not her name, which has given the film a sublime and illuminous quality making is a wonderful viewing experience.

The characterisation of Sita and Radha are unusually original. Are they completely fictional?
All characters are an amalgamation of human traits. That's what makes us different. For me, Radha is a composite of all the women I've loved and admired — patient, quiet and stable. Radha is my mother, or an aunt. Sita, on the other hand, is the voice of modern India. She is impatient, impulsive, a free spirit. When the film opens, you feel it's going to be Sita's story. But it's Radha's. Radha represents tradition. When she shifts, she blossoms.

What about Biji (grandmother) and Mundu (servant boy)? Do you know someone like them?
No, I've not known my grandmothers. Biji also represents tradition. I was very clear that I wanted a very frail but authoritative old woman for the role. She controls, but has no voice. That's the role of tradition in our country today. Physically on the verge of collapse, yet all there.

And Mundu?
Mundu represents repression. In our fast pace of living we have become totally insensitive to the private lives of our

servants. We behave as if they have no sexual desires. Mundu's outburst is a result of frustration. He vascillates between classes, has fantasies about being a king, admires his employer, but is restricted monetarily. At a deeper level, the film is also about our secret lives — everybody has them. We think we know our servants because they've been with us for years, we don't.

And Sita? Nandita Das plays the character with an efferverscence that is disarming. Was this natural?
Yes, it was. Nandita is a very candid person. I knew I wanted Shabana for Radha, but I wasn't sure what exactly I was looking for in Sita. I had interviewed many actresses for the role, but wasn't convinced. Then I was in Delhi, in my hotel room, and Nandita walked in. She looked at my *dupatta* and said, "I have a *dupatta* exactly like this." There was no reserve, no restraint and she wasn't doing it for effect. There was an innocence about her. I knew that very minute I'd found my Sita.

In contrast, there's a quiet dignity about Radha. How much do you attribute it to the actress?
I attribute it all to my actors. I love them. I love working with intelligent actors. One usually works with talented actors, but if they are also intelligent it's a stimulating experience. Before we begin shooting, I give my actors character-notes. These are crucial because I don't want to take away from them what they might want to contribute. Too many instructions might destroy their spontaniety.

What made you decide that you can become a film-maker?
I don't know. I remember asking my father how a film was made? How did the actors do what they did, without interruptions and mistakes? I remember my father telling me that there was a guy — the director — who told the actors what to do. He was their guide. I was fascinated. I told my father that when I grew up, I'd become a director.

And script writing?
In my earlier two films — *Sam and Me* and *Camilla* — I had worked with other writers and found myself rewriting a lot. I didn't want that to happen this time. I realised it's less complicated to write the screenplay yourself because, after all, I'm going to shoot it. I'm glad I did. The process of writing a screenplay is almost therapeutic. The exercise of

rewriting every scene, clears a lot of cobwebs. There is clarity and lucidity with each new draft. Screenplay writing is completely different from writing a book. Cinema demands a different pace, style and rhythm of writing. That is why very few books make good films. The other marked difference is in the dialogues. In films, they must resemble the spoken word. In a novel, you can read through reams and reams of quotes without feeling the strain, but not so in films.

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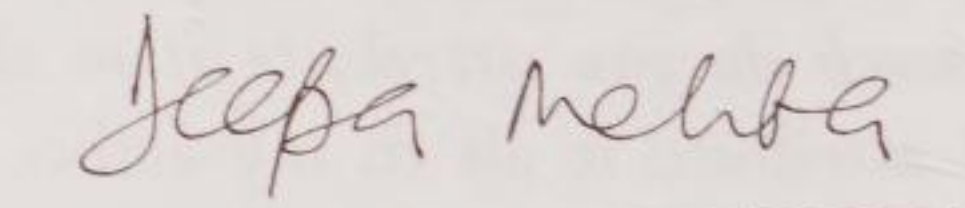
'The controversies relating to the film took over the content. It was a difficult phase. The vandalism at the theatres was very disturbing. It's not fair to dismiss artistic expression without giving it a fair chance. At that time I wasn't aware that what I'll be undergoing for my next film would be even more dramatic.'



(Deepa Mehta)

1998

MADHURI DIXIT

You enter the apartment and your first impression is it's a lived in home. Unlike most upper class families who treat their living-rooms as a showcase of artefacts, Dikshits' make no attempt to disguise their domesticity. Madhuri's father, Shanker Dikshit is on the sofa reading the evening paper, mother Snehlata is at the dining table drinking tea. The maid is in the kitchen, chopping onions and Madhuri's one- year-old niece, in sexy diapers wobbles around the apartment seeking attention. Madhuri hops into the room looking ravishing, invites you to sit beside her, "Talking to you from so far is like communicating on a long distance line." A Pepsi for her and Thums Up for me and some more light in the room later, we're ready for serious discussion on acting, attitudes and introspection.

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How much do you identify with Pooja of Dil To Pagal Hai?
(Pause) The stage I am in my personal life, I do identify a lot. There are similarities — both of us come from sober, middle-class homes with definite values. I'm shy, introverted, yet with a conviction of my own. Pooja has her convictions too. She strongly believes that someone, somewhere is made for her.

Do you believe in that philosophy too?
Yeh, it's plausible. The film emphasises that everyone has a mate somewhere. You just have to watch out for the signals...

Are you watching out?
(Smiles) Sure. I'm waiting, watching.

How will you know he is the right one?
I don't know, but I will, when he comes. I say that in the film too. I assure Shah Rukh Khan that he will recognise his mate when he finds her.

What if your mate gets intimidated by your stardom? What if he doesn't make the overtures? It's possible.
(Stares) It's a frightening thought. If that happens, it will be a great loss. I'm positive however it won't. I'm not the kind who shuts people out. I don't lock myself. I'm a normal person — off the sets.

After so many years in the industry nobody can claim to know you intimately. Is this deliberate?
When you do anything deliberate, you give yourself away. If I was projecting a cultivated image, I would have got tired of it by now. The fact I'm not, it means I'm natural.

At public functions particularly you come across extremely poised. Do you ever feel unsure?
(Laughs) What you call poise is a dressing up for nervousness. When I'm on stage for a thanksgiving speech, receiving an award, I can actually feel my knees trembling. It's just that I rise above the moment and conquer my fear. I can fib you know, I'm an actress.

What about your very appropriate speeches? Are they impromptu or you give them a thought before attending the function?
No, no. I don't plan any speeches. I come for a function, sit there watching, absorbing. If something moves me, I react accordingly. Prepared words always sound hollow. There's a ring of falseness to them.

Old guards who've heard you speak at public functions feel that you can be groomed to become an effective leader.
(Surprised) You mean politics? No, I'm not interested. Maybe something for the social upliftment, that too something that emerges as a natural process, not as a cliché.

Do you ever suffer character conflict over a role?
I do and let me tell you it isn't easy dealing with it. During *Beta*, I had to do a mela scene where I take on the villains and use challenging lines like, *'Aaja... dekhlete hai....'* I just couldn't get myself to do it because the aggression was so out of my personal character. Then, that comedy situation in *Raja*, where I had to be ballooned up in the old lady disguise. It was so grotesque and outrageous, I was physically so uncomfortable and felt like an idiot and therefore resisted it. But Indu*ji* wouldn't give up. He explained very patiently that illogical situations are a part of cinema too.

Which other?
In *Tezaab* there's a scene where Anil carrying a torch discovers me huddled in a corner and I go hysterical! I couldn't come to terms with such explicit expression of feelings.

When you're not convinced, do you argue with your director?

I discuss and explain my point of view. If he is open to suggestions, we discuss further. If he's stubborn, I give up. There are times, the director has predetermined the tone of his film and the slightest underplaying by the artiste upsets him. This happened to me in *Khilaaf*. In cases like this, it's better to take the middle path — perform it the way he's conceived it, but in a manner that does not make me too uncomfortable. Most of the time this arrangement works.

What about instances when he's open to suggestions?

Then the problem is automatically resolved. Chandra*ji* was sympathetic to my conflict and did his best to alter my mind frame. When I said I couldn't do the scene, he enacted it for me and suddenly it was all so attractive. Watching it as a spectator, I felt relieved and therefore willing to surrender.

What have you learnt from your directors?

From Indu*ji* I've learnt how to rely on my zany sense of humour. His comedy scenes are a difficult exercise for the performer, but he trains actors not to take life so seriously. From Chandra*ji*, I got acquainted with the power of the common man. His characters have violence. His dialogues hit you like a creaky chalk on a blackboard. His films evoke raw emotions! Subhash Ghai, of course, is a master of finer points. He taught me screen presence, voice modulation and many more tangible lessons. Raj Kumar Santoshi, with whom I'm doing my first film, I learnt the power of drama and impeccable discipline from Sooraj Barjatya. He's like a Boy Scout — always prepared before a scene. The kind of sincerity he lends to the simplest of scene, is touching. And finally, Yash*ji*. Take any of his films, he's always ahead of times. His passion remains undiminished. From him, I learnt sobriety of colours and textures. His sense of aesthetics is very high.

And co-stars?

(Thinks) I cannot remember off hand but during *Tezaab*, I had to do a highly charged scene and was finding difficulty with the right expression. When after several re-takes, I couldn't get it — Anil Kapoor, who was a part of the scene and watching my trauma said, "You don't have to think of an identical situation to get the expression. Think of

anything equally painful and the expression would still be appropriate..." He resolved a major conflict for me that day and ever since, whenever I'm using emotion out of context, I remember Anil.

The two of you have come a long way.
Yes, we've travelled through many hits and many flops.

A film-maker pointed out that you have a fresh approach to the most cliched roles, do you agree?
On the surface Nisha of HAHK, Pooja of DTPH and Ketaki of *Mrityudand* are similar people. Yet, there are definite subtle differences. While Nisha is more energetic, confident of her surrounding and herself to the extent that she's smug. Ketaki, though literate represents the backward society and is therefore hesitant until she's fully assessed her situation. It's only when she's sure, that she takes a stand.

And Pooja?
Out of all the roles I've played, Pooja is probably the most poised presence. The overpowering quality about Pooja is her reserve. It stems out of her being an orphan. In all her interactions, except with Akshay Kumar, whom she's grown up with, she is subdued and relies more on observations than expressions. Something about her body language suggests that she wouldn't just intrude or walk into situations. She suffers low self-esteem even if she doesn't show it. It comes out of her feeling indebted to her foster parents.

That's a terrific analysis. Are these character sketches mental or do you jot them on paper?
No, no. I have never ever discussed my characters with anybody. My friends and family tell me what they like or dislike about a film, but their reactions are not a part of my mental process in preparing for a role. I think, I depend on my directors to extract the best out of me.

That's for the performance but how do you work on the exterior of a character?
When I'm given a story narration for the first time, my mind is ticking. If the role is appealing, I just know the character instinctively. I have never kept notes, never even retained the script with me. I've often been questioned but never followed role models. I believe that more than the look of the character, it's her attitude that matters. In *Wajood*, I

play a journalist, who wouldn't hesitate to cross the boundary for a sensational story even if the mode for attaining the scoop was unethical. She's an opportunist. I've projected this more through body language.

You've enriched as an actress. Have the recent years brought changes in your fan mail too?
Yes and no. Variety of letters from different age groups, class and caste pour in. The reactions are a jumble of emotions. Some identify you as a daughter, some as sister and some romantic letters as well. After *Mrityudand*, a lot of women organisations wrote me encouraging letters. They were full of praise because I was fighting for oppressed women. Om Puri told me me that in Bihar, men have forbidden women from watching *Mrityudand*. It's yet another male tactic of subjugating women.

Would you say there are greater expectations from you after Mrityudand? ***Do you feel the pressure?***
(Thinks) Not pressure, but I do feel responsible. I feel I shouldn't do anything offensive.

You mean something like, 'Dhak dhak...'
Too much was made out of *'Dhak dhak...'* I don't think the song was either vulgar or offensive. It's sensual and what's wrong with a woman being sensual? Let me tell you that the audience tastes is changing. They are far more open to experiment today than they've ever been. If you ask me, we're entering into better times.

Are you curious about the parallel cinema?
I am, but I'm not so familiar with the work of these directors to give my opinion.

What else are you curious about?
At the moment? About pottery. I'm dying to try my hand at it. I long to do sketches too, but this profession is so absorbing that it leaves you with no free time. Whatever little time you get, you are dying to catch up with sleep.

What's your favourite hour of the day?
Whatever time I pack-up. When I come home, I remove my make-up, get into comfortable clothes and hit the bed.

What's the first thought when you wake up?
What time is it and I hope I'm not late! (Laughs) I'm

paranoid about being late. I have no reasons to because I always wake up on time. Whether it's an early morning flight or an early morning shoot, I wake up on my own without an alarm.

And the last thought before you fall asleep?
I review my day. I recount my actions and words. What I said to people, what others said to me. If I feel I have offended somebody, I make amends the next day. I say sorry. I have no ego problems in apologising.

What kind of dreams do you get?
Technicolour dreams with intricate stories. Once I dreamt of a Chinese prison in the underground. It's an old ruin without any doors or walls. An open air prison. There is a frail, old man with a white beard, who's been in the prison for years and trying to escape, but cannot even though he knows the way, because he's weak. A young man who has to meet the queen is brought into the prison. The old man befriends the young prisoner and together, they break free.

Any recurring dreams?
I have a voice calling out to me. I cannot decipher the words, but I can hear the echoes. It has a haunting quality and I have to literally jerk myself out of the reverie before I wake up. Anyway, this is not a very unsual dream. A lot of people I've shared my thoughts with, say they've had similar dreams..

Would you say you are happy?
Yeh, I'm always happy. Good or bad times, I'm an optimist. I treat my bad times as a learning experience. I'm of the firm belief that nothing in life happens just like that. There is meaning to every encounter, every expression.

What's your definition of happiness?
A state of mind. It's only when you feel you are growing, that you are completely alive.

Does shopping make you happy?
I'm not obsessed with possession. Spending a day with my little niece would make me happy... Being creative makes me happy. Using my time constructively makes me happy...

Can money be a source of happiness?
It definitely instills security, particularly for a woman. It

provides a roof above your head and to a certain extent gives you power and freedom. But beyond a point, money is just paper.

After so much name, fame and money, what are your concerns today?
To get some more (laughs). I'm only kidding. To know that you can do better and have enough space around you is the greatest kick. I think that's what keeps me going.

Your parents are getting on in age. With no family members around, it must be difficult at times?
I feel responsible, but it doesn't worry me. That's the way it is. We lead a fairly structured routine and there's no cause for alarm. Also, it's not as if I'm all alone. My siblings may not be physically present, but just one phone call and they'll drop everything to be with me. Our parents have given us so much, what we give in return is nothing.

When you are driving past in your car, what are you thinking?
This is uncanny, but the other day I was returning after a trial of *Ishq* and just thinking about Sadashiv Amrapurkar and his stand-offishness with the have-nots. I was wondering how relevant such situations are in today's times when right there — in the middle of the road — stood an affluent man bending over his car bonnet. An urchin girl was pulling his sleeve, asking for alms. He was so angry, he actually manhandled her! I couldn't hear what they were arguing because the windows were rolled up, but the situation was almost identical. A classic case of life imitating art.

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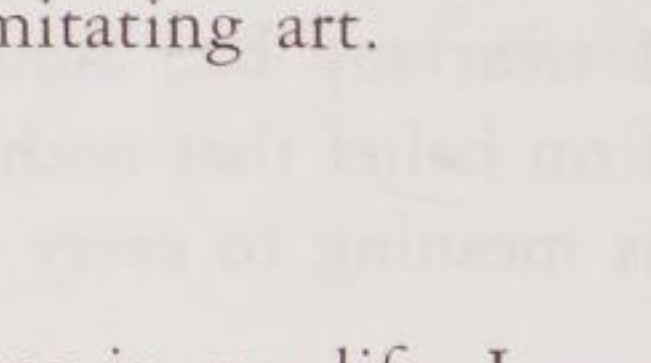
'The interview reflects a distinctive phase in my life. I was relieved not to be asked the predictable round of clichéd questions like marriage, current box-office position and comparisons with colleagues. It was post *Dil To Pagal Hai* and the calmness of the character reflects in my personal life. It's a fascinating observation.'



(Madhuri Dixit)

1998

OM PURI

After 40, it's difficult for an actor to adjust to new work set-ups. For someone as selective as Om Puri, even more so. Still, '96-'97 was a significant year for Puri. He signed films with directors he hadn't worked with earlier. More important, all of them were box-office successes. Basu Bhattacharya's Aastha, ***Gulzar's*** Maachis, ***Rajiv Rai's*** Gupt, ***Prakash Jha's*** Mrityudand ***and Kamal Haasan's*** Chachi 420. ***In a rare mood, the actor looks back on those experiences and shares what it felt like getting into the shoes of different characters.***

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Home. Trishul Apartments, Versova. Wife Nandita is in the nursery with baby Ishaan. A Bengali maid with a sexy armlet is dusting a scrupulously clean house and Jackie, Om's favourite dog is running around the terrace seeking attention. Unmindful of all this, Om with a cigarette packet and lighter, travels back to the summer of '84. "Many years ago, Basu*da* wanted to make a film with Zeenat Aman and me. This was in the early '80s. Zeenat was a busy artiste at that time, but had agreed. I think it was based on a Bengali short story titled *Shamshan*. The project didn't materialise because of unavailability of finance. Basuda and I'd bump into each other at festivals and sometimes at common friend Manmohan Shetty's home. He had this unusual ability of keeping himself alive and busy. He actively participated in society screenings and was clued in with the latest in theatre, films and art.

'Almost 16 years later, sometime in the early '96 when he contacted me for *Aastha*. He said he'd be making the film in Hindi and English. At first shot, it seemed like a good idea. It was an unusual story and there was this added attraction of working with Rekha. Nobody expected *Aastha* to be a hit. But then this is showbiz. You can never predict what will click. When the film was ready, there was a theatre strike and Basu*da* was contemplating to postpone the release. Sunil, my secretary who was assisting Basu*da* in production, advised him not to and go ahead with the releases outside Mumbai. The gamble paid off. The feedback was stupendous. Patronised by the female audience, there was a curiosity about *Aastha*. The hype was so much that the film was a hit in Mumbai even before its release perhaps because of the bold subject. I must admit though, that I wasn't too

thrilled with my character. I felt Amar could have been better defined. One expects this from a director recognised for his statements on man-woman relationships.

'*Anubhav, Aavishkar, Grihapravesh* were stories about marriages. I'm often asked if a character like Amar exists? My answer always is, 'Yes,' it's because I'm not a pessimist. I have faith in humanity and believe that first mistakes — when unintentional, must be unconditionally pardoned. "No moral conflict about playing a husband sexually deceived by a philandering wife? "No, because the circumstances are extraordinary. Till the end, the audiences doesn't know if the hero knows or doesn't. This makes their marriage all the more vulnerable." What about *Maachis?* Did he receive any angry fan-mail for playing a terrorist? Om shakes his head once again. Lighting another cigarette, he recounts how the film came about. "Those days we were shooting for teleserial *Kirdar*. Gulzar*saab* would often talk about the terrorism in Punjab. One day, he told me he was writing a film on it. A few months later, he mentioned a role for me. Sanathan is a chemistry professor who's now involved in a national battle. The character didn't need much input from me, because Gulzar's briefings are very specific. He's always well-prepared for his shootings and does not believe in keeping his actors in the dark.

'The fact that I hail from Punjab, am acquainted with the language and ethos, that I'd done *Tamas*, read and researched through all the books, helped a lot. Eventually, acting is not just the text, but also the sub-text. My favourite scene in the film is where I say, '*Aadhe ko to* 1947 *kha gayi*, *aur aadhe ko* 1984.' It's a brilliant dialogue because the writer with such precision of words gives such vast information. The only other parallel I can think of is Satyadev Dubey's line in *Kalyug*. I play a trade union leader and during a confrontation scene with the mill owners, palpable with unspoken tension — both parties hesitant to initiate the dialogue — the millowner finally breaks the ice with, *'To shuru kare...?'* to which I reply, *'Waqt bachega.'* The entire scene is in two or three words dialogue. That's the strength of a writer. The other moving scene in *Maachis*, I choke every time I see the film, is where Sanathan explains the struggle of freedom to the younger terrorist (Chandrachur), *'Yeh koi akeli jung thodi thi ki ek aadmi lathi lekar gaya aur azadi le aaya...'*

Next day. Om Puri's office at Rupal Apartments, few blocks away from his residence. A cosy sitting area comprising of book-shelves and cream curtains with floral prints. Om Puri in a grey jogging suit bending over large piles of photographs and files, looks preoccupied but cheerful. Mishra*ji*, as he is reverentially addressed by the actor, hovers around the place soundlessly, serving us black tea with Monaco biscuits. Once or twice the mobile phone rings, but Om ignores them, except from his wife, Nandita. '*Gupt* was released around the same time when my son was born. Ishaan being a premature baby, they were crucial weeks for us. Rajiv called me a couple of times for the screening, but I couldn't make it. I've still not seen the film, except for my own scenes during the dubbing. But one knows that the role has clicked from the reactions at the traffic signals. The urchin boys and the magazine vendors call you by your character in the film — that's the first sign of a hit film. 'My character in *Gupt* is a cop — Udham Singh. Unlike Anant Velekar of *Ardh Satya*, Udham Singh is without complexities. Anant was a troubled soul with a lot of pressures — a dominant father, an idealistic girlfriend and his own search for identity. In contrast, Singh is a reasonable guy. He relies on his instincts. A role like that does not need external trappings. In any case, I'm not an actor who depends upon get-ups. For me, the body language is more important. In the initial years, I looked for a role-model. Or let's put it this way, I looked for an identical reference point. With time, this exercise diminished. It's not necessary to find identical human alternatives — sometimes even animals can be a substitute.

'During the outdoor shooting of Madan Bawaria's *Shayad* at Indore, I went to the market place on the lookout for a role inspiration. After a long drive, I came across a *chauraha* where an interesting sight caught my attention. I spotted a quick-footed lamb — she went from one hawker to another, picking up vegetables, pieces of cloth and bangles. Every vendor she stopped at shooed her away in disgust, some abused her and some ran behind her with a stick — but she strolled around the place unconcerned. I decided I'd borrow the *bakri's* attitude for my role — shameless and spineless! My favourite scene in *Shayad* is where I'm in the general ward of the hospital and Naseeruddin Shah in a private ward. I walk into his room uninvited and make myself

comfortable, use his loo, eat his fruit and even borrow his magazine. I'm familiar to a point of embarrassment and the only way decent people like him can deal with me is with disbelief!

'Nowadays, I'm learning to rely less on outside inputs and more on the script. Eventually, I'm the instrument and I must know to tap my potential for the appropriate responses. For *Mrityudand* however, it was important to depend on a get- up. I've worn a bushy moustache and carried a heavy shawl over my shoulder. The manner in which the shawl is draped is very dramatic, it gives a lot of authority to the post. Both these contributions were Prakash Jha's suggestions. Interestingly, Ram Baran wasn't the role I was initially offered. When Jha first approached me, it was for the role of a corrupt politician, eventually played by Harish Patel. Later, he gave me a choice between the minister and the lower-class trader. I chose the latter, for I felt it had more possibilities and wasn't one-dimensional. Also, it holds a mirror to the decaying aristocracy. Ram Baran, though schedule caste, is without malice. That's why when suddenly powerful, he's authoritative but not vicious. When angry and hurt, he is sarcastic but not offensive. Despite all his pride, Ram Baran is a noble man. A quality I'd like to believe I possess as a human being.

'So many times, after watching a good performance of a talented colleague, I feel like communicating my appreciation to them. There are times I do, but there are also times, I don't. I'm conscious when appreciating a film-maker. It's because you don't want to be misunderstood. A lot of artistes don't have hang-ups about asking for roles. I do. It would be embarrassing someone who may not know how to refuse. Fifteen years is a long time for people to know about people. Awareness does not come through reminders. When the time and choice is right, films happen on their own. *Chachi 420* did. 'Rajkamal Films' phoned and sent a cassette of the Tamil version *Avvai Shanmughi*. I flipped through the cassette skipping major chunks unsure of exactly which role was meant for me.

'To be honest, I didn't think much of the role. The attraction was the fact that I'd be working with Kamal Haasan. I have great respect for his talent and consider him the only actor in India who does not wait for opportunities to happen.

Kamal creates opportunities. Naseer, Aamir and I lack the drive to initiate projects. If they come our way, we give it our best shot, but will not go out of our way. Kamal does, he undertakes a lot of risks. It speaks of dedication, discipline and great organisation. Shooting for *Chachi 420* was a great opportunity to get to know Kamal and his family. The first five days on the sets at Madras were a nightmare! Nobody knew what was happening and I almost thought it was a mistake accepting the film. Then Kamal took over the reins and things fell into place. When the atmosphere improved, one felt like working on the role automatically.

'I play Amrish Puri's self-important manager who is forever talking on the cell phone. Durga Prasad Bharadwaj dresses in safari-suits with oily hair. Sadly, it occurred to me much later that we could have in fact turned Bharadwaj into a poor cousin of Amrish Puri. As it is, there's a resemblance between us and this would have made the roles more authentic. My favourite scene in the film is Amrish Puri getting hospitalised and me organising his funeral on the phone. The scene wasn't in the script. One day during lunch break, I thought it would be a good idea if the manager was secretly celebrating his boss' demise to discover that he has recovered. Two days later, Kamal came to me and said, 'Remember your suggestion about the funeral. We are shooting it today.' Immediately, we put our heads together and churned out something on paper. Good performances are a balance of give and take. Between the director and his artistes and between co-artistes. The chemistry always shows results. The camera is too sharp and misses nothing.'

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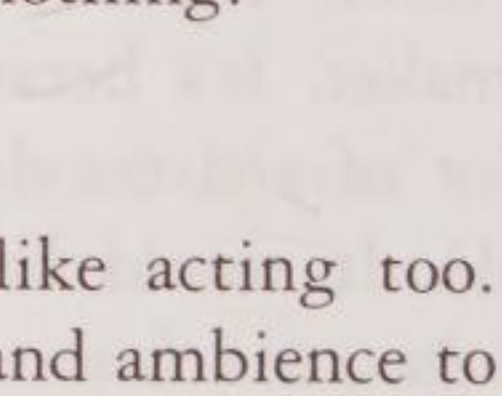
'Talking about acting is to a great extent like acting too. You have to be in the right mood, company and ambience to unfold your feelings. My role in *Shayad* was truly inspired by watching a lamb on the street. Over here we have to still learn the art of giving actors sufficient time and space to prepare for a role. It will happen I guess once the film-makers start giving complete scripts before shooting.'



(Om Puri)

1998

RAMGOPAL VERMA

What's attractive about Ramgopal Varma is that his personality reflects nothing about the kind of films he makes. Reticent, almost scholarly looking, he can pass off as a doctor or a chemical engineer but most certainly not as a film-maker. The director is ready with his next project – Satya. *Starring Telugu star Chakravarthi and Urmila Matondkar, the director is determined to re-establish his box-office persona. I met him at his modest home in Versova on a Saturday morning. Still in his night suit, the director was watching television in the living room. We broached many topics from politics to painting, but Ramgopal Varma was focussed on* Satya.

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Were you disappointed that your last film Daud *didn't do well at the box-office?*

It bombed (laughs). After the release, Shekhar Kapur called me and said, 'Ramu, I believe this isn't one of your best works.' His wife Suchitra was less diplomatic. I dropped by at their home for dinner. As soon as she opened the door she blurted out, 'Ramu, what a horrible film you've made.' Strangely, I didn't think so while making the film. I was attempting to make a lighter version of *Romancing The Stone*. A roller coaster ride to entertainment, a slicker version of David Dhawan's *Aankhen*. It didn't work. In trying to incorporate six songs, I screwed up the story.

Where do you think you went wrong?

After the waterfall sequence, the film went for a toss! According to me, the magic faded the moment the hero and heroine hugged each other. There was no conflict after that. Nothing to look forward to. Friends who saw the film phoned to say that the audience wasn't taking the climax seriously. They were expecting another twist to the story.

Couldn't you have rectified the mistake earlier?

You will not believe this, but I had a nagging feeling that I was making a mistake even when I was shooting the embrace scene. I expressed my conflict to my actors, but both of them reassured me that it was just a friendly hug without sexual overtones. So I thought I was perhaps overreacting.

Are you the kind who often overreacts?
No, but perhaps I was overconfident. I had been riding over two superhits — *Rangeela* in Hindi and *Anganga Wokraj* in Telugu and thought that I could get away with this too. In my enthusiasm however, I forgot to put myself in the audiences' seat and paid a heavy price for it.

You must have shown the rough cut of the film to some people. Didn't they guide you?
I showed *Daud* to 25 people before release and everyone loved it. This means that either I chose a wrong group or that they too, being connected to the project, were not objective. I'm sure something similar must have happened with *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* too. We take two years to make a film and the audience judges it in two hours. It just proves that you don't need an intellectual to judge a film.

Do you agree that all creative art is autocratic?
(Surprised) No. Cinema is essentially an emotional expression. Crores depend on a film and when a director fails to communicate, the film bombs. My main problem with *Daud* was, that I didn't have an emotional hook to the subject. Also, maybe I wasn't as preoccupied or obsessed with the project, the way I was during *Rangeela.* What I regret most about *Daud* not doing well is that had it succeeded, it could have opened up new vistas in Hindi film-making. What failed about the film, was the execution, not the idea.

Tell us about your new idea, Satya?
Satya is based against the Mumbai backdrop. The crime and grime of the city. My earlier film *Shiva* dwelled on street fights. Today, however the problem is more serious. Your immediate neighbour could be from the underworld and you'll never come to know. *Satya* breaks the stereotypes glorified by mainstream cinema. The real don isn't a gelled hair villain surrounded by bikini-clad women. He isn't talking on the cellphone sitting in Mauritius. During my research, I met a prisoner who has several murder charges against him. The man looked almost harmless, not at all forbidding. My film explores the human side of the killer — his pathos and pain. It projects the psyche of the crime, not the glory of it.

Isn't it a dangerous subject at a time like this?
Yeh... but this isn't the first Bollywood film to be made on the underworld. It's happening for years... Even before *Deewar.* And just because the underworld nexus with the film world got blown out of proportion by the media, it doesn't mean film-makers will never broach the subject. My film is an insight into a murderer's mind frame. The killers are human too, they laugh and cry and often we touch upon their lives unknowingly. Arriving at a decision of an encounter is far more traumatic than the actual act of killing!

Really, how do you know?
I do. I've spent hours, weeks with them. They are victims of changing loyalties. The recipients of the fear and stress associated with it. They live from moment to moment, without trust, without hope. If a killer is travelling from VT to Versova, he changes three vehicles and four chauffeurs. I have witnessed the funeral of an underworld relative. The atmosphere was volatile. He was more angry than sad at the loss of his brother. He kept mumbling that this had happened because his brother had not obeyed his orders. I have visited their workplace — where they plan such encounters. In an isolated cell, on a long rectangular table lay a large pile of cash which no one attempted to hide when we entered the room. And hard cash, in large amounts, when lying undisguised, for some strange reason makes you feel scared.

You don't look like someone who'd be easily scared?
Ha, appearances are deceptive. A film-maker does not necessarily resemble his films. A banker does not necessarily look like a banker. Human emotions can be quite unpredictable.

How predictable are you?
Not quite. My self-image changes from film to film (chuckles).

Isn't that a contradiction?
No, because earlier I was speaking for others. I am different now (laughs again).

Are you aware that people call you hot-headed and arrogant?

I don't think anybody who knows me sufficiently would agree to that and I don't want to get defensive and revert to a cliché that I'm misunderstood because I'm frank. Seriously, I wonder what triggers such impressions. It could be because I'm preoccupied. I'm impatient and cut off people mid-sentences when I've anticipated what they are saying.

Isn't that a shortcoming for a director?

Yes, but that's me. I'm highly charged and absorb the character traits of my film. I was spirited during *Rangeela* and reckless during *Daud*. My mind frame affects the film and the film affects me. Cinema is eventually an expression. You start with one idea and as you explore, come up with different perceptions. A lot has to do with the director's state of mind at the time of shooting. That is why the greatest creators make mistakes of the simplest of plots.

What about directors who do post-mortems of their actor's performances in print?

(Sighs) Now don't start on this again. *Rangeela* was two years ago and Aamir and I have resolved our grievances and agreed that we will never discuss the subject with the media again.

Do you regret the episode?

I regret hurting Aamir. Conflict in ideology usually leads to hurt.

No such threats from friends Mani Ratnam and Shekhar Kapur?

It's because we are not working together. We are partners in a joint company, but that has nothing to do with our friendship. Our communication is based on healthy respect for each other's work. *Bandit Queen* has shaken me. I'm thoroughly impressed by Shekhar's talent. On the other hand, inspiration for visuals comes from Mani. Until I saw his films, I never took song and dance seriously. Discussions apart, I don't think either Mani or Shekhar take me too seriously. They think I'm a brat.

Are you?

I think so.

Does your family agree with that?
I lost my father a few years ago. For my younger siblings I'm the *anna*. They react to my films like an average audience. They like some, they hate some. My mother is more tolerant. She loves all my films, because I'm making them.

Have you ever wondered what you would have been, were you not a film-maker?
Whatever I would have done, I would have been miserable. I love cinema and I don't want to be anywhere in the world, except behind the camera. I love 'Mad' magazine too, but nothing to beat films.

Any unfulfilled ambition?
I want to work with Amitabh Bachchan.

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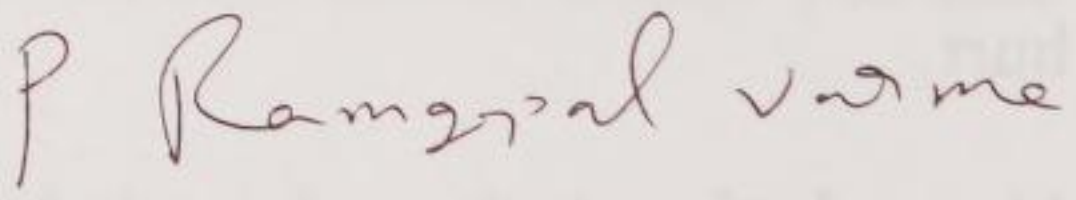
'A sensible critic is like a watchdog for the artiste. Much as the artiste fears him, he longs for a stimulating communication. Particularly, when the artiste knows he's on the threshold of his favourite work. I'm on the threshold of *Satya* and am tired of answering inane, frivolous allegations.'



(Ramgopal Verma)

1998

TABU

Even in her debut film Hum Naujawan, ***Tabu's talent was never in doubt. Came*** Vijaypath ***and the*** 'Ruk ruk ruk...' ***girl was labelled as the new dancing sensation. Came*** Sazaa-e-Kalapaani ***and she was the new hope for meaningful cinema. On one hand*** Virasat, Darmiyaan, Maachis ***and*** Thakshak ***and on the other,*** Saajan Chale Sasural, 2001 ***and*** Kohraam. ***How does the actress strike a balance between creative and commercial?***

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It has been a year of awards and appreciation, how does it feel?

Sometimes, I believe in them. Then I feel happy, but most of the time, I don't take the applause too seriously. It makes me feel special, reassured but it's almost as if it's happening to someone else. I want to feel high but something prevents me. I've been reared to retain normalcy, to not react in extremes.

Is it because you are superstitious and therefore suppress happiness?

I don't suppress it, I'm just not able to express it whole-heartedly. I want to enjoy it as long as it lasts. Maybe it won't for a long time, maybe the future may not be as productive. The joy of winning an award is that it endorses appreciation. Suddenly, the same people view you from a different perspective.

Had you ever anticipated your career would take this course?

Never. Not in my wildest imagination. During the five long years when *Prem* was in the making, I never thought I'd make it big as a heroine. I had no goals, but since I had dropped out of college to pursue films, I didn't want to fail. I wanted a constructive routine of shootings and dubbings like other actors and actresses.

Is it true that you began to cry on the sets the first time you had to shoot a dance sequence?

I was howling because I couldn't get the steps and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't help myself. Saroj Khan was frustrated with me and so was the rest of the unit. It was a nightmare. I had fever for days after the shooting was over.

So how did you rise above the fear? Today, what do you think are your assets as a star?

(Thinks) I really don't know. Different people say different things. I often think that there should be an opinion poll to investigate what clicks about a certain star. It would help us as artistes. Or maybe not. Because perhaps, the magic is in the mystery. And that is why, we are forever groping. My directors tell me that they like me because I'm awkward. Isn't it strange?

Can you imagine any other actress playing Maachis?

(Flashing her eyes) No. Not just *Maachis*, I cannot imagine any other actress starring in any of my films. I'm very possessive about all my roles.

Sazaa-e-Kaalapani ***was your first step towards meaningful cinema. Who advised you to work with Priyadarshan?***

You are right. It was a turning point. Mani Ratnam heard about me from Priyan, then Gulzar saw the film and one thing led to another. Nobody advised me to sign the film. I have always taken independent decisions and been responsible for the repercussions. Priyan was shooting the climax of *Prem*. One day, he told me that he was working on a subject that had taken him seven years to get on the floor. He said there was a small role, and wondered whether I would do it. I said okay. I had heard about Malayalam films, about Mohanlal and cameraman Santosh. But Priyan didn't take me seriously. He told me later that he thought that like all the Bombay heroines, I would chicken out at the last minute because it was a regional film. And as coincidence would have it, when he phoned me for the dates, I was in fact committed to Moranis for a show. What I earned from the film was a piddly sum from what I would have made at the show but I listened to my heart and I've never regretted it.

At that time were you aware that they would be dubbing the film in Hindi?

No... Nobody did. That's it. When something good has to happen, it happens on its own. Before signing the film, a lot of my colleagues had poked fun at me, predicted doom for doing Malayalam films, but it was the most memorable experience of my career. I was the only outsider in the unit, a rank newcomer but they never made me feel so. This was immediately after the failure of *Prem* and the outdoor worked as a healing process for me.

One has heard that Priyan is a hard taskmaster.
He is a disciplinarian. All of us woke up at 3 a.m. and left the hotel by 3.30. After the long drive to the location, the first shot was always canned by 5.30 a.m. When I think back, I don't know how I went through it — not the early rising, but the long dialogues in Malayalam specially since Priyan shoots the entire scene in one take.

How does an actress of your sensibility adjust in Saajan Chale Sasural ***on one hand and*** Maachis ***on the other hand?***
(Smiles) It is a part of my job. I don't feel either superior about my meaningful roles or apologetic about my commercial films. It is best not to think too much about them. Whether it's Raj Sippy's *2001* or Govind Nihalani's *Thakshak*, I surrender to the ambience.

On to Thakshak, ***what's it like working with Govind Nihalani?***
Till he gets what he wants, he will never give up. It's good because no matter how impatient or anxious an actor feels, there's no denying the fact that cinema is eventually the director's medium and he is entitled to have the last word.

The pressure can impose a lot of strain.
Sometimes, but as a professional you should be equipped to deal with it. It isn't as if you are in a military regime, the director is indulgent too, but the pressure is the preoccupation.

Have you ever been in front of the camera and not got the required expression?
So many times and I know there will be many more occasions. During *Sazaa-e-Kaalapani*, for one scene, Priyan wanted me to give 16 emotions in one take. There were long dialogues and there was the additional tension of the sun going down. When after 15 takes I wasn't getting the right expression, I could see that the unit was getting impatient. This, when Priyan okays all his shots in maximum two takes! The thing about retakes is that with every 'one more', the actor begins to feel demoralised. His next take is worse than the previous one because he feels guilty about wasting raw stock. By the end of it, I was ready to burst into tears. Fortunately, by this time the sun had set and the unit had to forcibly pack up.

At such moments how do you handle your embarrassment?
I'm too drained to put up a facade. I share my feelings with the film-makers, find out what's going wrong and how I can improve myself.

Are you as forthright in your personal relationships as well? Do you believe in clearing cobwebs in relationships?
(Pause) Personal life has more at stake, so one is always weighing the pros and cons of an outburst. In intimate relationships, when hurt, I withdraw without explanations. It's because I'm saving the other person from hurt. I feel the conflict will resolve on its own, without my expressing the problem. But that's not how it happens.

It is believed that great artistes are born out of unhappy childhood.
I don't agree. In fact, I'm not even certain of the importance of childhood in any person's future.

What kind of a childhood did you have?
Very shielded. My parents parted when I was three years old. For me, their marriage was a closed chapter from the very beginning. My growing-up memories are so blissful and fragrant — of my grandparents and the time spent with them. There were absolutely no deprivations.

What kind of fantasies preoccupied you as a teenager?
(Thinks) Never films. My mother says I never asked for a toy. I never possessed a doll, until my *nani's* sister got me and my sister a blonde doll from England. I still possess the doll. I wasn't a movie buff. If I watched serious films they left me with a hangover. I was sad for days after watching *Masoom* and *Muqaddar Ka Sikander*. My sister Farha was the film buff in the family. She had to see a film every Saturday. I was more into grandmother's stories, Oscar Wilde and gardening.

So what inspired you to get into acting?
(Shrugs) I can't say. That my aunt Shabana Azmi, her family, my sister were in the business. Even now, I don't know from where I draw my inspiration. But there must be something, without it it's not possible to give consistent performances. For myself, all I can say is that till now, my characters — Parvati or Veera — have been my inspirations.

Are you ever confused by any character? What about Chachi 420?
Somebody else asked me this too. He said I looked disinterested in the first half. If that's what I have conveyed, it means I have failed somewhere. There was never any confusion about the role in my mind. Janki Bharadwaj is frivolous, a brat, but not unreal. I've known people like her in my life and therefore played her with a lot of attitude.

Is it true that you are playing Salman Khan's bhabhi in Sooraj Barjatya's Hum Saath-Saath Hain?
Yes and don't say that by doing so I'm restricting my chances to play his leading lady. Nobody has signed us all this while, so I'm not going to refuse a good role in the hope of signing a romantic lead opposite him, Shah Rukh Khan or Aamir Khan. I make choices according to my instincts.

What have you learnt from your roles?
I don't study my characters so closely. Analysis scares me, I feel I'll become more confused.

And life?
I'm still learning.

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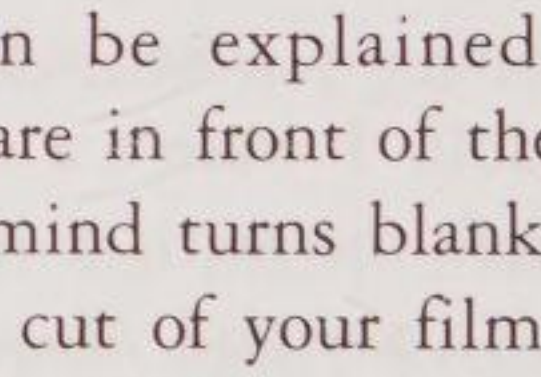
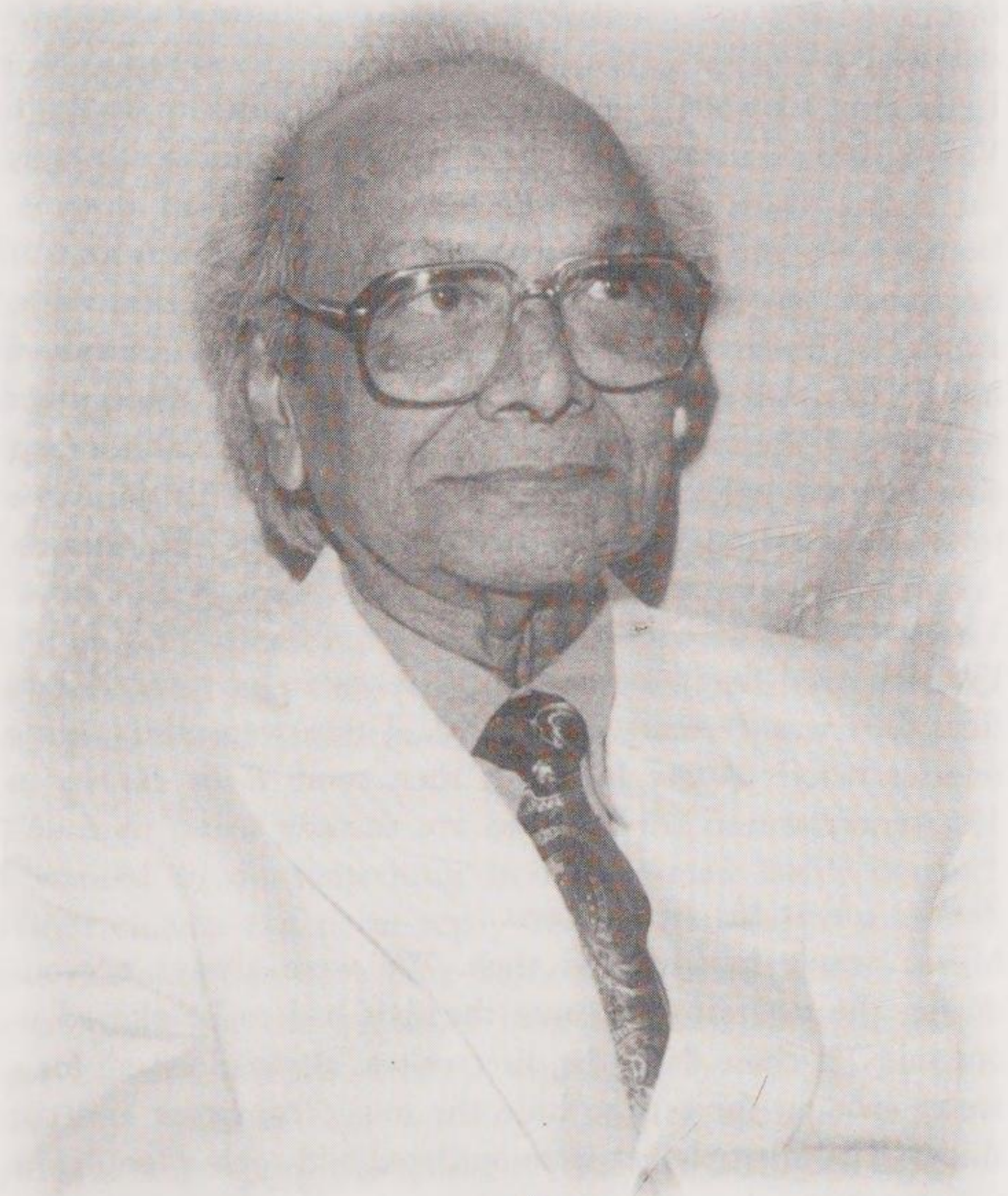
'I was petrified at the thought of answering so many profound questions on acting. I don't understand the complexities. I don't think acting can be explained. Something just happens to you when you are in front of the camera. And when the lights go out, the mind turns blank. It's so strange, but when you see the first cut of your film, you forget every unpleasant association with the film – your impatience, the director's anxiety, your differences with your colleagues, nothing matters. That's the power of celluloid. It engulfs you, mesmerizes you..!'



(Tabu)

1999

NAUSHAD ALI



The man behind golden jubilees like Rattan, Mughal-e-Azam, Ganga Jamuna, Deedar, Anmol Ghadi, Dard, Dulari, Dillagi, *Naushad Ali needs no introduction. Probably the only music director to survive six decades,* Tere Payal Mere Geet *and the Shah Rukh Khan-starrer* Guddu *are amongst his recent releases. After a sabbatical, the National and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award winner is in the news again. This time, for penning and composing. The maestro released two albums,* Mere Sur Aur Tere Geet *and* Aathwan Sur, *an anthology of Urdu ghazals, dedicated to the late Mohammed Rafi. I met him at a book release function where he was the chief guest. Excerpts of the conversation:*

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It is said you ran away from home to pursue a career in music.

I was only 16 when I left my home in Lucknow to settle in Viramgaum, Gujarat. Here, I worked with a drama company for a few years, until I was led to the city of dreams, Bombay. It was a long struggle. Only, we never felt it because our needs were so simple. My friends and I stayed in a lodge at Dadar and survived on *chai pav*. Today, newcomers have it so much more easy. It's because we paved those paths for them. I often tell my colleagues that we came at a wrong time. We struggled then. And we struggle now. It pains me to see old-timers going through a rough time. It's not fair.

You've had an exceptional career.

I've struggled for it too and never taken it for granted. My first film was *Premnagar* in 1940. There were about nine releases before *Rattan* in 1944, then came *Baiju Bawra* in 1952 and the rest just followed.

Tell us about the vintage era.

Music wasn't so advanced then. We were always nervous during the recordings because the shot had to be okayed in one take. In those days, the director was always looking for a secret spot on the sets to hide the music composer and the singer. The microphones were outdated and took a long time to warm up.

What's your impression of our current films?

I'm often asked this and my answer is repetitive. I don't

know why but we seem to be intimidated by the West. We've somehow convinced ourselves that their worst is better than our best. It's a strange complex that 50 years of Independence hasn't taken away. In my opinion any self-respecting Indian wouldn't be proud of our films or music today. Our music is a part of our culture and it's our duty to preserve it.

Why do you think it's not happening?
Because of our low self-worth. Those directors who believe in this go out of their way to preserve it. Such attempts have always been appreciated. *Maachis, Roja, Bombay, 1942: A Love Story* had melodious numbers. The effort has to be an ongoing process. We cannot be content with the few quality films and forget about the rest. My protest is against plagiarising. We should have condemned the first time it happened. Instead, gradually it became a precedent. Film-makers borrowed cassettes from abroad or other regions and blindly copied. Isn't it shameful that we need to do this, when we have such a rich heritage?

What made you return to showbiz after a long hiatus?
I realised that an artiste never really stops creating. In fact, if he doesn't use his tools, he might wither away. I tried staying away, partly disappointed with the trends and partly tired, but I wasn't happy. So I returned and this time to write as well as compose. I've been writing in the past too, but anonymously. Few people know this, but *Deedar, Palkhi, Babul, Malik, Uran Khatola* are my stories. I cannot tell you how much I've enjoyed writing *ghazals* for *Aathwan Sur* sung by Hariharan and Preeti Uttam. The album is dedicated to my good friend Mohammed Rafi.

The raga based ghazals are unusual for its modern touch.
I wanted to do something in Mohammed Rafi's honour. Hindi cinema can never repay his contribution to music. I felt *Aathwan Sur* — a note beyond the music scale — was appropriate for the genius. I have to admit though, that I was hesitant initially. I felt I would not be able to fit into the new technique of working. But the albums and the positive response to them have revived my faith. I'm happy I took up the challenge. During my recent trip to UK and the USA for the album release, the reactions were overwhelming.

Any future projects in the pipeline?

Let's see. There are a few offers, but I don't want to rush it. I'm not used to deadlines and prefer working at my own pace. I'm assisting a voluntary organisation and that takes a lot of my time. The society does a lot of good work of collecting funds and distributing it amongst needy artistes. It also offers pension to the deceased's family. These are duties of the film industry, but they don't have any back up arrangements.

There was an announcement about you setting up an academy.

It's been my long cherished dream. I always wanted to set up a music centre in the city where professional training would be imparted in vocal and instrumental music. We don't have such an institution. If we want to popularise classical music, it's necessary. We cannot do it unless the Government supports us with a plot of land. We've initiated our dream by organising a classical vocal concert by Ustad Rashid Khan at the Nehru Centre, the proceeds of which will be utilised for the funding of the activities of the Academy.

To what do you attribute your success?

To the grace of God. I had my feet firmly entrenched in the ground and didn't get swayed by my success. Similarly, I absorbed the failures as part of life. The highs didn't spoil me and the lows didn't depress me.

Is it true that you seldom socialised and boycotted award functions?

I boycotted awards designed by magazines, not from the Government. In those days, they gave awards to actors, singers, but not to music composers. I felt it was unfair because it is the music director who creates the singer. We composers work so hard, synchronise innumerable instruments, that's when a singer attains supremacy. If you can acknowledge the voice, why not the creator? This is an industry of star-struck people. They don't care for creators.

Can you define the creative process of composing?

Different artistes have different methods. Even disciples trained under you create their own methods. The process cannot be taught, it has to evolve on its own. There are times you struggle for days, there are times, you get it in a

jiffy. The music director may work miracles, but the soul comes from the writer. The words must have meaning, without this there's no magic.

Have you ever regretted being in films?
Never. Not when I slept for nights on the footpath...not in my lowest moments. We longed for the first ray of the sun. Success was an obsession.

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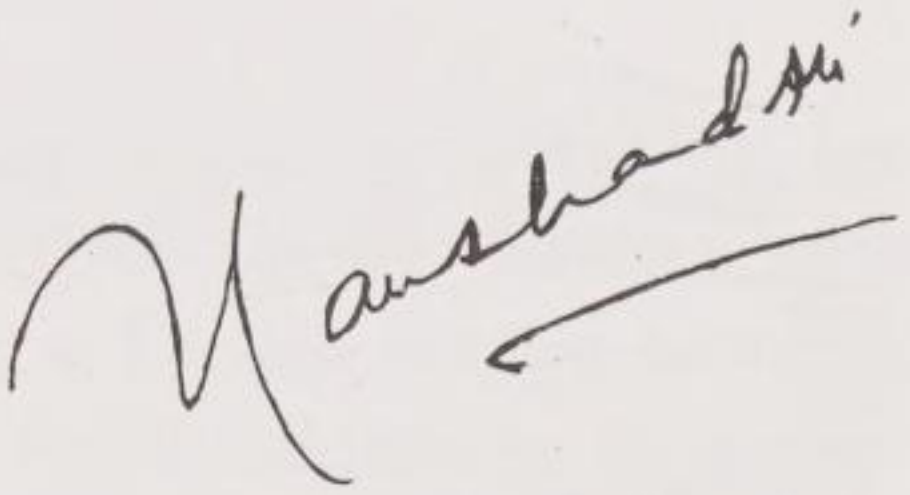
'*Karwaan guzar gaya, gubar dekhte rahe...* That's life.'



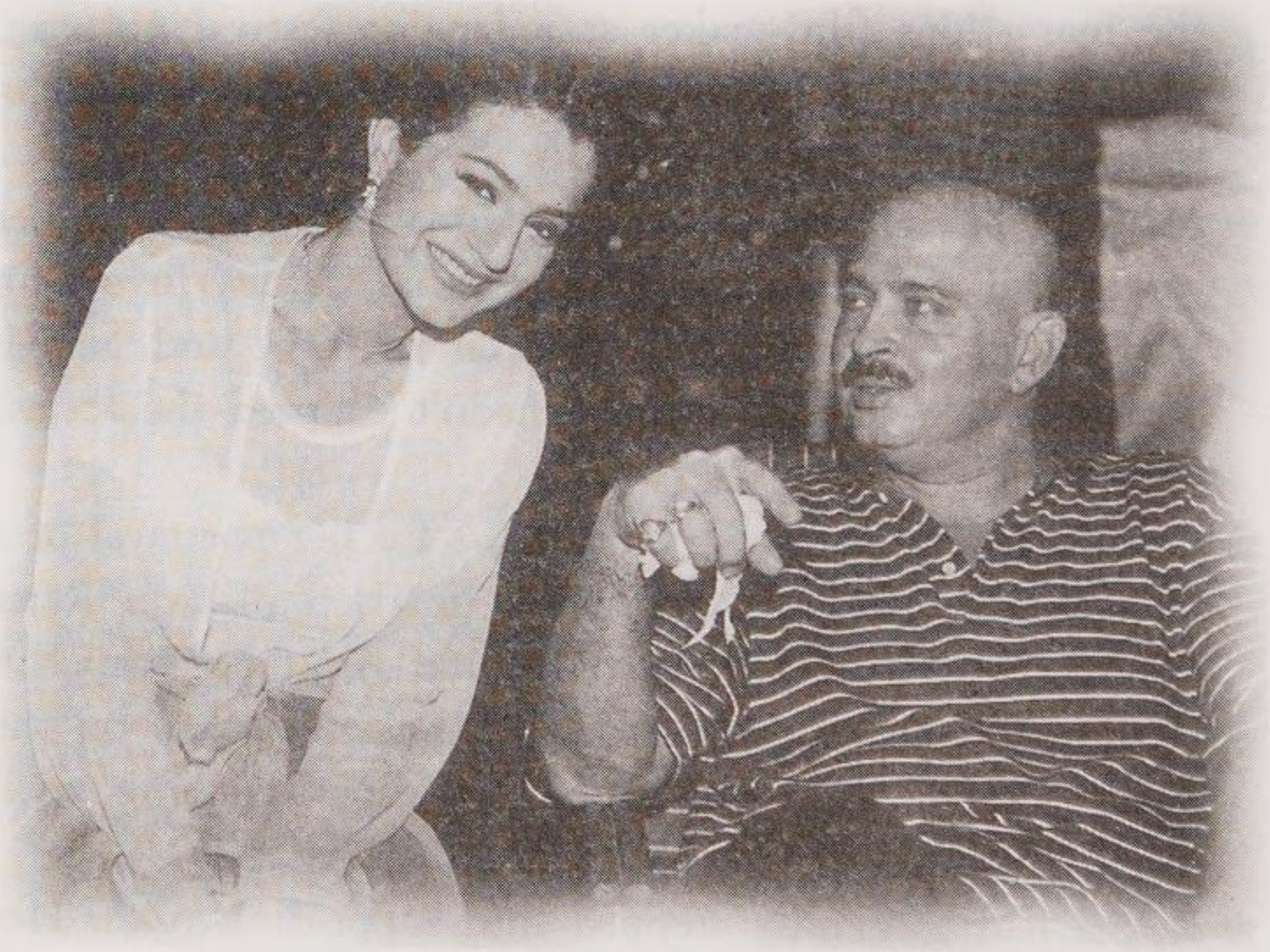
(Naushad Ali)

2000 was a significant year. The dotcom was the mantra of the new millennium and Hrithik Roshan the flavour of the season.

- Film-maker Rakesh Roshan's *Kaho Naa.. Pyaar Hai* created a sensation at the box office, followed by an attempt on his life by extortionists demanding money. The interview was conducted amidst tight security and a lot of tension.
- Rati Agnihotri who had quit films after a sudden and mysterious marriage, returned to the arclights with Rahul Rawail's *Kuch Khatti Kuch Mithi*. A lot had changed and a lot remained the same, even though the actress had been in exile for a decade.
- Aparna Sen wasn't on the list originally because of her limited association with the Hindi cinema. Meeting with the marvellous film-maker at a London festival however, was a stimulating experience translated into an interview-to-remember.
- Manisha Koirala was going through a low phase in her career but diverting herself to social causes involving trafficking of women and children in India and Nepal. The new role though exciting hadn't eclipsed the actress in her.
- Urmila Matondkar was in the news for her portrayal of a maladjusted girl obsessed with a married man in Rajat Mukherjee's *Pyar Tune Kya Kiya* and Amitabh Bachchan reeling under the glory of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* on the small screen, was simultaneously experimenting with unconventional roles on the big screen like *Aks*.
- Rekha had gracefully stepped into supporting roles. Her portrayal of a rape victim inspired from a real life incident, *Lajja* proved a turning point in her career.
- Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* celebrated 300 weeks, making it the longest running film in the history of Indian cinema and *Mohabbatein* completed a golden jubilee run. Proud father and producer Yash Chopra talked about why love is the central theme of most his films.
- Karan Johar, after the stupendous success of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was ready with *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, estimated as the costliest film and the biggest grosser ever.

2000

RAKESH ROSHAN



There is heavy security outside the building and there are reasons for it. Film-maker Rakesh Roshan has survived a near-fatal accident which is going to take a long time to recover. Outside and inside 'Kavita' building a row of plain clothed men wait carrying cordless phones. My arrival is announced on the intercom and after the protocol screening, I'm finally led upstairs to the third floor. In his den, Rakesh Roshan attired in a turquoise blue lungi-kurta, *surrounded by artefacts is talking on the phone.* Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai *has completed 50 days and he is issuing instructions about it to his creative department. 'If the posters don't arrive by tomorrow, it's going to be too late,' he tells his publicity designer. The actor hasn't been attending office ever since the shootout, but his phones and his mind work overtime. He is planning the next schedule of his long delayed* Karobaar *and also monitoring son Hrithik Roshan's career. Tea arrives in dragon painted chinaware and after the preliminary conversations, I come straight to the point.*

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Did you expect you would survive the shoot-out?
Yes, I believe that what God proposes man cannot dispose. I was meant to survive that is why I was blessed with the presence of mind to react to the situation the way I did.

Were you aware of the frenzy your hospitalization created?
Not entirely, but I'm grateful for the support the film industry offered me in my moment of crisis. I wasn't allowed to meet too many people for the doctor felt I could get excited. Only the family members walked in and out of the room. I wasn't given the newspapers, except when I complained. Everytime my family felt I was asking too many questions, they would send the doctor inside who would advise me bed rest.

Your wife said you made a restless patient.
It's because I'm not used to being confined. As it is I'm hyperactive and hated being put up in a cubicle. It was quite annoying. I wanted to know what was happening outside. If the case was being followed up and the assailants nabbed.

I was worried for my son's safety and didn't want him

hanging around at the hospital and most important, if I was going to be in the hospital longer, if I could interact with my story department and get cracking on the new project.

Newspapers reported that you suffered a heart attack.
I didn't get a heart attack, but because the bullet had passed my heart, a surgery was essential. While undergoing the surgery, we discovered that two of my arteries were blocked and decided to restore the damage.

So now you are as fit as a fiddle?
Absolutely. I've always been health conscious. Post-surgery it was important for me to rest for a while, but I'll be attending office in a few days and life will restore to normalcy.

Can life ever be normal after the traumatic experience you've been through?
Do you see anything abnormal in the environment around you? The security downstairs are doing their duty and my duty is to rise above the situation as calmly as I can. It was a nightmare, I agree and I wouldn't wish it to my worst enemy, but life has to go on. We cannot cling to moments, good or bad.

Have you gotten over the failure of Koyla?
I had to, though when one is hit by failure, it seems unsurmountable. This is very strange, but as an actor you can rise above the failure of a film closest to your heart. But as a film-maker, even when your worst film fails, you feel defeated.

Why is that so?
It's because a film-maker, be he the producer or the director takes success and failure personally. He also has so much more at stake, financially and otherwise. A failure for a film-maker is rewinding life by five years whereas as an actor, you can recover your money and image with your next release.

That's an interesting observation.
It is. If you look at all the actors around you, you will notice that they all got into production at the peak of their careers. Sunny Deol, Ajay Devgan, Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan and now Aamir Khan. Sadly, they don't realise that by doing

so, they are buying tension! When they are getting paid as actors, it's more rewarding to concentrate on their performances. They should sleep well and look good. But by launching their own banners and getting weighed down by the production problems, their stress is apparent in not one, but row of films. The camera is very sharp. *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* so clearly reflects Shah Rukh Khan's duress.

In that case why did you get into production when you did?

My case was different. I was never a top star and even then, I avoided turning a film-maker for a very long period. The temptation was always there heralding from a film family and now when I recall my first few films, let me tell you, it was not at all easy. I was extremely tense and my colleagues Jeetendra and Rishi Kapoor would forever poke fun at me. Looking back however, it was all worth it. I started young and learnt the ropes young.

How do you explain making some very successful and some mediocre films?

Even a genius cannot give hits all the time. Yes, there are some films I am not proud of. These things happen. What you shoot reflects your mindframe. Sometimes, despite your best efforts the projects go wrong. Some of them are jinxed from the very beginning.

The reverse is also true say like Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai.

Films come with their own destinies. Projects blossom on their own. My son told me a few years ago, that he wanted to be an actor. He worked towards grooming himself systematically-diction, dance, action and emotion. When I watched him from behind the camera, I knew he wasn't overestimating himself.

And how did it feel when watching him on the big screen?

I don't think the experience can be described in words. My wife and I felt a lump in our throat and that's how it has been all these months. His performance in the film and his conduct during the tragedy has done me proud. What more can I ask for as a father? I have lots to thank God for.

What about Hrithik?

Yesterday, I went to see the film for the first time in a theatre and returned home very emotional. He has done a

good job, but he still has a long way to go, a lot to learn. This is just the beginning. There are going to be many surprises, but level-headed that he is, I have faith that he'll take it in his stride.

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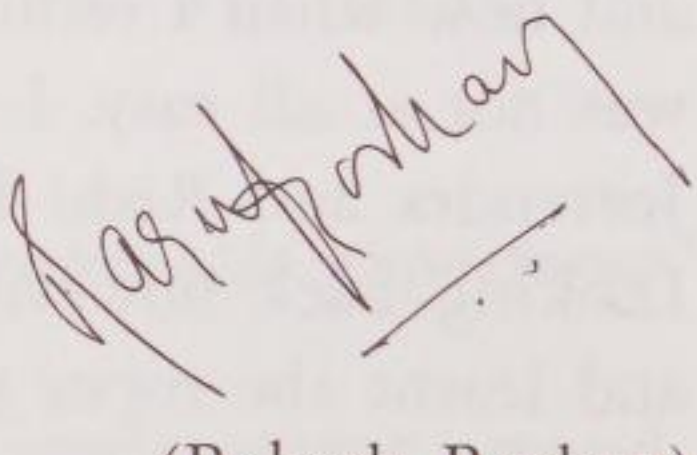
'A good interview according to me is one which evokes interesting conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer mustn't trespass into the star's private domain and the star should feel confident to discuss his thoughts without feeling persecuted.'



(Rakesh Roshan)

2000

RATI AGNIHOTRI

Her directions to the address are very specific. It reflects her personality. The doorbell is within the outer door of the floor and unprepared, you walk into the Virwani domain. The staff is expecting your arrival and informs madam on the intercom. Rati Agnihotri joins you immediately. Peach coloured pantsuit, hair tied in a clip and the famous Virwani diamonds. Her favourite dog follows soon after, and there are frequent phone interruptions, but Rati requests everyone to call later. It's a sultry afternoon and from Rati's sea facing window, you can see the beach changing colour. "It's my favourite hour of the day," she tells you staring at the golden sand. "Whenever I'm at home, I like to have my tea staring at the sea..." It's been 15 years since Rati quit acting and got married and there's a lot to catch up.

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So what have you been up to all these years?
I was never the kind to sit idle at home. I did my masters in Reiki, studied Naturopathy and later Sujog, the art of healing through acupressure. It's been my nature to get deep into the subjects that interest me. Don't laugh, but briefly I even learnt tailoring. I meditate, do sculpting, stain glass painting and these days of course, I'm passionate about candle making.

So is Dimple Kapadia?
Yes, but I'm not doing it commercially as yet. I make them because I enjoy it. Whenever friends drop by and appreciate them, I give away as gifts. Our home in Pune is full of candles, so is this house. Whenever we are entertaining, we don't use any other lights.

Did you undertake training for candle-making as well?
Actually it just happened. I saw a friend of mine making them, absorbed the basic from her and after that just improvised with colours, shapes and concepts and evolved my own style. It's quite obsessive once you get involved. There are days I am in my workshop for hours at stretch, not wanting to leave the studio till I've accomplished the task.

You never thought of assisting your husband Anil in his construction business?
I do, whenever he needs me for creative inputs, but I don't

enjoy working on a day-to-day basis. That becomes binding.

Is that why you quit acting, to not be bound?
No, I quit acting because I had taken a conscious decision to close shop. I had been shooting three shifts almost 17 hours a day and was feeling the strain. I started working when I was 16 and when I got married I was 24. When I was on my honeymoon, I realised that I liked having my own space. It felt wonderful not racing against time. I returned to Bombay and made up my mind. I would complete my films under production and the rest I returned the signing amounts.

And you never missed the arclights?
No, because I'd given it up out of choice. There was no unfulfilled desire in me. I was a leading star and big offers were coming to me, in fact they continued for a long time, but I wasn't tempted. Yes, I'd sometimes see a film and like a role, but it wasn't for a burning passion that I wish I had done it. It wasn't subjective.

Then what made you say yes after a long sabbatical?
This may sound strange, but when Rahul Rawail phoned me — a flash went through my mind. I didn't want to wake up one morning and feel that I wanted to... or that I could have, but didn't! Until then, I had never felt like... but this time I felt adventurous. I said to myself, let me at least try and I agreed to meet the director.

Do you know Rahul Rawail from your early days?
No, that was the first time I spoke to him. He came to the house and narrated the story. I had seen the new *Parent Trap* and loved it, so there was no confusion in my mind about the role. It suited my age and covered a wide span of 20 years. I agreed instantly. After that it was just the formality of defining payments and dates.

And are you being paid an hefty sum?
What's an hefty sum, I don't know. It was different during our times. I'm unaware of the figures in circulation today. I said I should be given a deserving price and he accepted without arguments. In any case, I'm not doing the film for money.

You have no qualms of playing mom to Kajol?
I'm mother of a teenager in real-life and if I was married earlier, maybe I would have had a son older than her. I have no false illusions about myself and when friends talk of my glory, I tell them that they are living in my past. To me what's attractive about the role is that she's not a stereotype mom. She speaks and dresses like a contemporary woman. The film is as much about the heroine as her parents' love story.

After saying yes were there any second thoughts?
No, I wouldn't have agreed if there were mixed emotions. Inwardly I was happy that I could resolve one more avenue without consultation. There was no sense of anxiety, if that's what you mean. Sometimes I feel it's my fault. I somehow don't feel overtly excited. I guess I don't allow myself to feel either euphoric or depressed.

Isn't that a defence mechanism?
On the contrary, I feel dwelling on it would border on self-indulgence. It's a convenient way of letting yourself go. I like being in control. It's only with people I'm close to that I drop my guards, show my vulnerable side. Like my family and close friends.

And what were their reactions?
My husband Anil was happy for me. He had been telling me to get back to acting for quite a while, so he was relieved to know that I was at last being sensible. My son Tanuj was excited too. He said, 'Cool mom.' In fact, he even suggested that I join a crash course to brush up my skills.

Do you feel nervous about being on test again?
I know I'm going to be under a lot of scrutiny and if I set myself unrealistic standards, it is bound to misfire. I don't want to bog myself down with what people say and rather concentrate on giving my best.

How difficult is it adjusting to the routine of make-up man, hairdresser and costume designer? Is your old staff still around?
It's been a long time, 13 years and my old staff is employed elsewhere. Costumes are the least of my problems. I've told Rahul that I'll take care of my own wardrobe. I want to look as natural as possible and will avoid wearing wigs and

hairdos. These are superficial adjustments, what worries me are the emotional upheavals. From the beginning, I've been used to being buffered by my staff and family. My dad handled my career and when he passed away suddenly, Anil was surprised how ill-equipped I was to handle a crisis. I spoke to Anil an hour after his demise to tell him I was leaving for Delhi. Within four hours, he was by my side, taking pertinent decisions. That whole year was a nightmare because producers hounded me for dates and I had decided to get married. It's commendable how wisely Anil handled it all and considering he was only 24.

Your marriage was low profile and your husband for a long time kept under wraps. Was it your decision or his?
The circumstances were so turbulent. Dad's demise had crumbled mom and me completely and Anil was our only support. We were reassured in the relationship and keen on commitment without celebration. He was the right man for me and it's uncanny how much he had in common with my dad. Like him, Anil shielded me from small and big problems. He does so even now. Often, I get to know the enormity of a crisis when the problem is over.

Will he be helping you manage your career the way your dad did in the olden days?
I wouldn't want it nor would he. It's about time I learnt to do it myself. To know that he is behind me — supporting my choices — is more than sufficient.

How would you describe the years gone by?
More than satisfactory. Between 16 to 23 I was facing the arclights, then I got married and enjoyed the blossoming of a new bride. Two years later, Tanuj arrived and another decade passed by watching him grow.

How does your son react when you are recognised at public places?
When he was very young, say till he was about nine, he didn't bother. Later, I saw him feel a bit awkward if I was getting more attention than necessary. He knew I was different from his friends' moms, but I think it took a while for him to understand why... Later on, he got used to his mother re-inventing herself, occupied with some activity or the other. Now of course, the circle is complete. I've never understood women complaining of monotony, for I never feel bored...

What about feelings of regret? Any offers during this long break that created conflict?

I loved Madhuri in *Mrityudand*. I love everything that Kajol does on screen, for her sheer presence is electric. Manisha Koirala was brilliant in *Dil Se...* and *Khamoshi — The Musical* and Tabu in *Virasat*, but I don't say this because I want to be in their shoes. They wouldn't fit me, except maybe Madhuri's role in *Mrityudand.* I'm aware that I'm at an awkward stage and roles are going to be few, but it doesn't matter as long as they are meaty.

Are you in touch with any of your old colleagues?

No... but then I wasn't socialising even when I was working. We were friendly during shooting but after pack-up there was no contact. Poonam Dhillon and I did *Tawaif*, but became friends only after we got married. We would meet at our children's birthday parties and even though Ashok and she have split, Anil and I are friends with both.

Last, what are you expecting from the film industry?

I know they will be warm towards me because I didn't leave with bad memories. Whenever I'm bumped into my senior or junior colleagues at a party, the vibes have always been positive.

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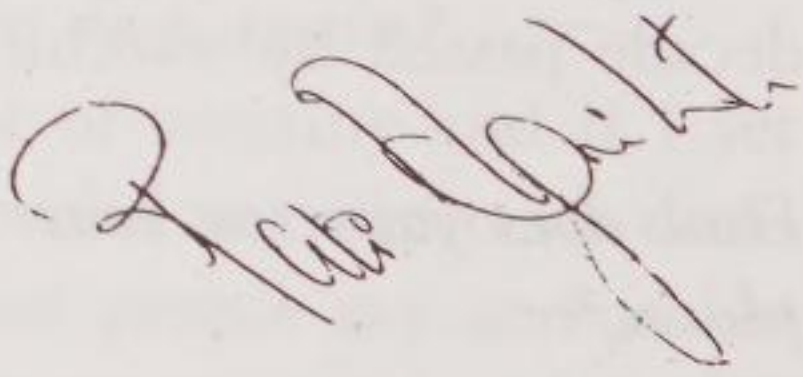
'I was returning to films after 15 years and out of touch with the art of giving interviews. Initially, uncomfortable, I enjoyed the exercise for it eventually helped understand that I'm responsible for all my decisions.'



(Rati Agnihotri)

2000

APARNA SEN

It's a cold day at Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. In Focus and AsianImages are presenting an Aparna Sen retrospective as part of the Asian Women's Festival titled Tongues on Fire 2000. Screenings of 36 Chowringhee Lane, Paroma, Yugant *and* Paromitar Ek Din *are followed by discussions and workshops. I meet Sen at the showing of* Yugant, *the story of an estranged couple returning to the little fishing village where they had spent their honeymoon 17 years ago. In a series of flashbacks and flashforwards, the film examines a man-woman relationship set against the backdrop of a civilisation threatened by ecological disasters, changing moral values and disintegrating relationships. Later in the evening, I catch up with Aparna Sen over dinner.*

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You started your career as a child artiste. Were you aware of what was happening around you?

My father was a friend of Satyajit Ray who needed a young girl for his new film *Samapti.* I was the natural choice. I enjoyed being in the studio, found the atmosphere fascinating. In fact, during the shooting I had such a wonderful time that when the film was over, I hated going back to school.

After doing that one film, did you sense any discrimination between you and your classmates?

Not from my classmates or teachers, it's just that I felt that there was a vast difference in my choice for films and books compared to them. Most girls in my class watched cartoons and fairy tales, whereas I was brought up on a diet of serious films and classics. Not unusual being brought up by film buff parents.

Then what drew you to mainstream cinema?

I don't know. I made my debut in the mainstream and after that somehow all the films were successful. Time went by and I was getting more and more embroiled in the formula films, for that's how the box office functions. My father was apalled by the films I worked in and often grumbled about it. So did I and gradually as I became more conscious, a certain restlessness began seeping in. I ignored it for a while, but the anxiety surfaced at the oddest moments.

Can you recall a particular incident?
There were several. I would walk into a set and find it had nothing in common with the character I was playing. The contradiction worried me and I began making suggestions.

They were not always welcome. I was interested in the craft and found myself making note of the trolley movements. Many a times, when I watched the film later, I felt that the director should have used a wider frame, but hadn't. Once I was playing a housewife and had to shoot a scene where I'm ironing. During the scene, I suggested to my director that maybe I could burn the shirt in the process. He loved the idea, but when I saw the film, I noticed that he had retained only my close-up. I was livid. Where is the burning of the shirt, I questioned him? "It's not necesssary," he explained. In another film, I was playing a pregnant woman visiting a doctor. The actor was wearing a torch band on his forehead and looked more like an ENT specialist, than a gynaecologist.

It must have been exasperating.
It was amusing and in a way I think they were the germs of the director getting ready in me. Not that I was conscious of it at that time.

So when did you first become conscious that you wanted to become a film-maker?
I didn't know direction, but I saw vivid pictures in my mind and I was unafraid to asks questions. I was dissatisfied with the roles I was playing. I had made up my mind to do something more creative, attempt writing short stories. But because I'm not a professional writer, the short story resembled more like a screenplay. After reading it out to some friends, I decided to take it over to Satyajit Ray. Ray liked it immensely, said there was a lot of heart to it and advised that I make the film myself. He suggested that I contact Shashi Kapoor, those days funding middle-of-the-road cinema. I wrote him a letter, he called me to Mumbai and *36 Chowringhee Lane* was born.

The film looked path-breakingly different.
The look of any film depends on the cinematographer and the art director. Originally, I wanted Govind Nihalani as my cameraman, but he was busy. One day, I was surfing channels and caught a film called *Witness*. For a cabaret

dance sequence, the cameraman had used harsh rotating lighting, in the background. I thought it was an interesting technique and decided on the same cameraman, Ashok Mehta. After that, Ashok and I would have frequent discussions where I'd show him pictures and paintings, tell him what I like, what I didn't and would even ring him up to ask him to watch the sunset outside his window to watch the lighting. He was very supportive. I told him I wanted the film to have the colours of a crushed flower preserved in a book.

What made you cast Jennifer Kendall as the Anglo-Indian teacher?

That Jennifer would play Violet Stoneham, immaterial of the fact whether Shashi produced the film or not, I was very sure. She was a marvellous actress and perfect for the part, and had it not been for her, the film would not have been possible.

What made you include that intriguing dream sequence blending marriage and funeral rites?

I have always been fascinated with dream sequences. In fact, some day I hope to make an entire film comprising dream sequences. Those days particularly, I was reading a lot on dream interpretation and have used all that in the film. Even now when I see the sequence of young Jennifer coming home and opening the door of the house leading to a graveyard, I get goose flesh.

How would you interpret such a disturbing dream?

Home is the symbol of womb. Whenever one is scared or insecure, one seeks refuge in home. The protagonist being an Anglo-Indian has no roots. Her loved ones are all dead, that's why she sees the graveyard. Water is symbolic for sex. Stoneham has lived a lonely, celibate life and her outcry in the end can also be interpreted as an ecstacy of an orgasm.

Is it true that even Sati ***is inspired from a dream?***

I had haunting visions of a stallion galloping towards a dumb blonde, who rests her face against the animal. The visual was so compulsive that I just had to translate it on screen. I searched for an Indian context and discovered that in our tradition if a man or a woman with a faulty horoscope was married to a tree, he could get rid of the curse. This was particularly relevant to the high class Brahmins. Uma, my

protagonist of *Sati* is one such victim. She is an orphan and she's mute. To ward off the stigma of a faulty horoscope, her family gets her married to a tree. It's the tree Uma has grown up playing with, hiding her valuables and seeking refuge. I used the tree with its masculine branches and roughness of the bark to represent the sexual overtones.

Quite complex and interesting.

I like complexities. I like my films and characters dwelling on multiple layers. I feel we underestimate our audience. They analyse and enjoy the complexities as much as the director. It doesn't matter if some of them don't get the message the first time. With films that matter, you watch them over and over and everytime, you have new insights.

Is it true that Paroma ***is inspired from a school friend's life?***

That's right. An old friend was having her son's first rice eating ceremony and we attended the function. All social interactions are interesting and I was fascinated at how she switched roles with her relatives. Subservient and taking blessings from an older relative, she blessed the younger folks when they touched her feet. The same person with us friends regressed completely. When I came home I wondered which out of the multiple roles she had projected was the real person. Did she have an identity of her own or was it just the social roles she played? *Paroma* is about a middle age woman in a feudal family and her quest for an identity. That she gets involved with a younger man is just incidental. *Paroma* questions social conditioning by patriarchal society.

Men particularly felt threatened by the film. How did you deal with the pressures?

Paroma came a little ahead of its time. The outcry amongst the Bengali intellectuals was universal and some of them even cornered my father as to how his daughter could make a film on adultery. There were angry protests, but that's the beautiful bit about West Bengal. They protest, they don't crush your creative space. There were angry debates, but the tide passed by like all storms of life.

The film has recurrent images of the insane woman with cropped haircut.

Yes, they are images of the adultress. First the aunt locked in the room upstairs, *Paroma* has watched and feared in

childhood. Then the woman on the streets and in between her own image. It took me a while to figure out how I was going to logically arrive at my protagonist having to shave her head. But it was inevitable. For centuries the woman hasn't been able to escape the trial by fire.

What inspired Yugant?

It's a film closest to my heart and even though it's been some time, I cannot talk about the film without feeling disturbed. The film reflects my anguish. I wrote the script in a hospital when I was undergoing a surgery and watching endless television. Those were times of the Gulf war and the havoc it played with innocent lives. The war forms a backdrop in the film about a couple adjusting in urban life. I wanted to say that love and feelings have everything to do with your surroundings. It cannot blossom when everything around you is in flames. It is for me, my most important film.

Whom do you empathise with — the husband or the wife?

I empathise with the characters, understand them both, being urban intellectuals. They are different and yet fatally drawn. She is rooted in her tradition and strong. The husband is not as connected as the wife, he overthinks, is obsessed with death. The catalyst is the wife's activist brother who questions the futility of life. It's a film about budding corruption and how the wife, even though stronger, stoops to make compromises, which alienates the husband. The end is philosophic. The film begins with Vyas' quote from The Mahabharat telling mother Satyavati that they should retire for the earth has aged with the sins of the humans. I have used Vishnu Puran fable of Goddess Laxmi returning to earth in the form of a turtle and changing destinies of those who see her.

Your films very strongly take up for the marginalised voices.

I'm interested in their concerns. It bothers me for instance that we never use the handicapped as characters, unless it is to tell their story as protagonists. Isn't that strange? Don't handicapped people exist amongst us? It's something to think about. Maybe one day I'll make a film about insanity.

Is that why you thought of Paromitar Ek Din***?***
Social relationships continue to intrigue me and the oldest phenomena is the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. No matter how much we may fight it or run away, the mother- in-law is an integral part of a daughter-in-law's social orbit. The sooner the two women find a meeting ground, the better it is for both of them. *Paromitar...* is about the bonding of these two women, both victims. Later, the daughter-in-law divorces her husband and marries another man, but the two women continue to be friends.

Do you see yourself as a feminist?
I see myself as a humanist, not feminist. I certainly don't hate men. In fact, I quite like them. I don't have any agendas, no isms attached to issues. Some critics have described *Paromitar Ek Din* as a lesbian film. There are shades, but it's primarily about a crumbling mansion and crumbling relationships. The film once again strips familiar identities and observes women in a patriarchal set-up. *Paromitar* and her mother-in-law, the two protagonists are temperamentally different, but with similar problems with their husband. Coincidentally, both have a handicapped child. The older woman has a schizophrenic daughter and the younger, a spastic son. It's a calmer, more mature film, quite a long journey from my debut film.

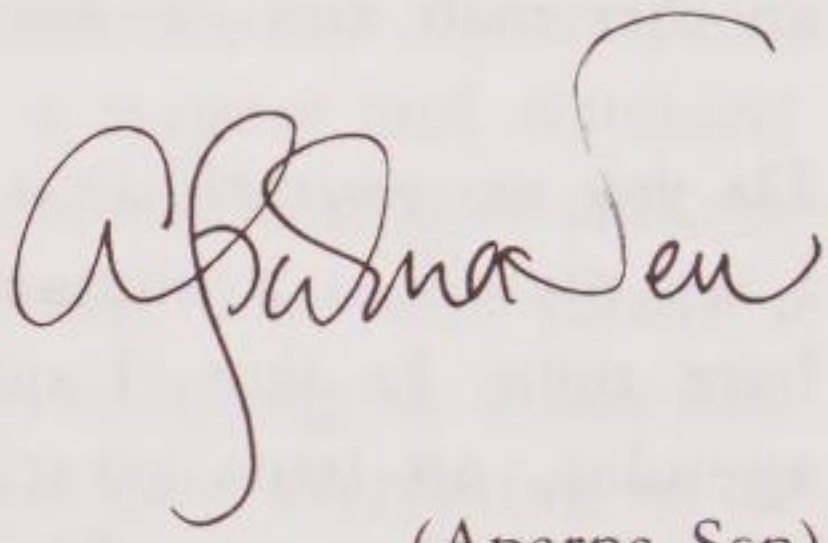
If you had to reshoot 36 Chowringhee Lane, ***what would you change?***
I wouldn't change the content because I agree with Ray that there is a lot of heart in the film. But when I watch the film today, I feel I have used too much zoom. I would get away with that. In fact, I remember my cameraman warning me against it, but I didn't listen. I liked the effect of jumping from one point to another. Also, if I were to make the film now, I'd edit it differently.

Except for the telefilm Picnic ***and the Shabana Azmi-starrer*** Sati, ***you never thought of moving to Mumbai mainstream?***
It didn't happen and I don't regret it. After Satyajit Ray made *Pather Panchali*, Hollywood invited him to make a film for them, but Ray declined the offer saying that he can only make films where he understands the milieu. I understand Bengal. I'm attracted to Mumbai mainstream, but want it without compromising on my creativity. Also, if

everyone moves away, who is going to make films in Calcutta?

❀❀

'The conversation was conducted at various stages of the seminar I was attending in London. When you are at a festival you are in a mood to discuss your work. Open to interactions. This was one such stimulating phase.'



(Aparna Sen)

2000

MANISHA KOIRALA

Manisha Koirala has emerged amongst the serious actresses of Hindi Cinema. Starting with a teenage romance uniting old friends in Saudagar ***('91), Manisha came into notice in*** 1942; A Love Story ***('95). Playing the daughter of a freedom fighter, she sacrifices her love for her country. In the coming years, she played the separated wife fighting for the custody of her child in*** Akele Hum Akele Tum ***and the protagonist of the communal riots,*** Bombay. ***The battered wife of*** Agnisaakshi, ***the responsible daughter of*** Khamoshi ***('96) and the high class call-girl of*** Yug Purush ***('98). Over the years, her roles turned more complex and performances rivetting, but Manisha confesses that she's tougher than she looks.***

❀❀

How do you react everytime an article appears about you in print?

Most of the time I'm expecting it and am prepared for it. Often, I feel exploited. I have said those things but in a different context. Answers are mischievously interpreted and since they are my quotes, I cannot refute them. I'm learning to take them in my stride, but even then, certain very strong statements raise my eyebrows now and then.

Somehow, one does not associate your interviews with your performances.

I know what you mean. I agree, I often come across brazen and reckless. I react under provocation. That's what journalists want, a good copy. There are no absolutes here. I cannot stop talking to them, besides most of them are my friends.

So how much of what one reads is the real Manisha?

I would say eighty per cent — I only speak what I feel. I'm not at all image conscious. My feelings are more important than words — and sometimes, I do pluck harsher words to express myself, which in print, sound too bold. Sometimes, this gives me heartburns because I'm worrying about how the other person will react. Most of the time, the person being a part of the film industry, is used to it and therefore hardened.

Isn't that sad?

(Pause) It is, but that's the way with showbiz. It hardens

you. You learn to desensitize yourself, with the media, with everybody.

Are you trying to say nothing hurts you?
I'm not the kind to get hurt easily. It comes out of a discipline of having trained yourself that whatever happens, happens for the best.

A great philosophy but is it practical?
That's what a friend of mine asked me too. He argued that it was neither logical nor practical, but I've realised that in temporary situation, it does offer solutions.

For instance?
For instance, I have a very foul temper. I'm allergic to disorder and inefficiency. I'm impatient with inadequacy and weak people, people who promise to deliver and duck when unable to. Over the years, I'm learning to overlook these deficiencies, learning to lower my expectations. I may be losing a bit in the bargain, but it's helped me buy peace.

Are you easily depressed? How do you rise above suffering?
I used to, but not anymore. There was a time I completely identified with Guru Dutt, his films, his philosophy. I was a brooder and dwelt on unnecessary emotions. Then, all of a sudden I succumbed to the magic of life. I said I'm here today and will be gone tomorrow, might as well be happy.

You make it all sound so simple.
(Laughs) It isn't and I do get upset when my boyfriend betrays me or a film of mine flops if I'm taken for granted, but growing up with my grandmother, a wise, strong lady, I'm able to deal with it.

So what are your concerns today?
We're all committed to specific duties and they impose certain limitations. My concern is to stretch these limitations, to expand my capabilities and excel in all roles of life. The trouble is that the responsibility of one, restricts the other. I cannot keep my commitment with my family, because I'm delayed on sets by my producer. I feel I was a better daughter before I got into films. Then, I had more time to translate my intentions into action. Nowadays with the mounting pressure, I'm even forgetting important

birthdays. This year, my mother had to remind me not to make any appointments on her birthday.... It is not a good feeling.

You feel guilty?
Yes... It's a whole lot of strange, complex emotions. I have been studying this very minutely and it's my observation that parents give more attention to the star child than the other siblings. It's unfair but also unavoidable. The process instills a lot of guilt in the star, who is forever compensating towards the sibling. There are also more expectations. My mother expects me to look after my brother when she's out of town. But she never says that to my brother. It can also be because Siddharth is younger.

Would you say you are a good sister?
I'm the big sister, sometimes strict, sometimes indulgent. During our growing up, for a major portion, we stayed apart. I grew up in a large family in Nepal and he was forever in a boarding school. After coming to Bombay, we had a lot of catching up to do. I think I'm a better sister after I became an actress.

What about the daughter?
I want to be a perfect daughter, I want to give more time, but I think I give less and take more from this relationship.

How much did you draw from real-life for your role in Khamoshi?
Not consciously. I can relate to a daughter feeling responsible for her parents, but I felt greater empathy for Seema and Nana's roles, than my own. Their helplessness is greater than my sacrifice. *Khamoshi* is my parents and my entire family's favourite film.

How much does the actress influence the individual?
Certain times when I don't flare up, control my heart and don't make a decision until I've talked to my sounding board, my mother, I feel the actress has matured the woman. On other occasions, when I let myself go, say what I want to and do what I feel like, for the pleasure of the moment, I can see that the woman is taking over the professional. I enjoy both these emotions, the control and the recklessness. It's healthy to vent your feelings once in a while, even if it hurts others. It's cathartic.

And where do you draw the line between the two?
I don't, I don't like lines, rules bore me. Both are me, so why pretend? Though I get to know myself better I think when indulging in the craft. Then, the self is deriving from the actress... I'm touching upon new and different levels of emotions and understand life that much better. But when reflecting the moment in hindsight, the actress is deriving from the person. Do I sound confusing?

Has any role caused you conflict in ideology?
I'm not overtly obsessed with morality. Ideology is subjective and has different perspective for different people. My values are my own, not for display. Recently, I was criticised for doing a magazine cover with a cigarette in my hand. I'm not apologetic about it. It was a part of the film publicity and I firmly believe that personal preferences should not be mixed up with profession. I cannot be blamed for setting a wrong example.

What about Agnisaakshi ***and*** Yug Purush, ***would you deny that they are wrong role-models too?***
I don't think either of them defeated the purpose. In one, I'm the battered wife who when oppression becomes unbearable, flees from the clutches of the oppressor. In the other, a call-girl craving for peace and never obtaining it. *Agnisaakshi* is an inspiration for all women suffering in silence. And *Yug Purush*, a warning against unwilling compromises. Both the films had a positive message in the end.

But you didn't do these films for the messages, you did them because the roles were attractive?
That's true, I did them to explore my acting capabilities. I want to be a good artiste for myself, not to change society. And that's the honest truth. That's why I did *Bombay*. That the critics recognised it as a landmark film, suited me, but I did it for the role, not for the social message.

Isn't that selfish?
It is and I'm not hypocritical about it. It is vanity, I agree, but without vanity you cannot be an artiste. Ask any artiste and they'll tell you that the first time they watch a film, they only see themselves. It's only the second time, you watch the film in totality. After all these months, even now when I'm watching *Bombay*, I'm thinking about how I could

have improved on my performance. But that's me, never satisfied with anything I do.

In that case, how do you deal with superficial roles like Hindustani ***and*** Yalgaar?

What to do...? There are not many choices. You accept certain films for certain reasons and abide by them. If you are too money-minded, you lose the cream roles. If you only crave for roles, you live on dreams. It's not easy, but it has to be a balance of both.

Your friends say you are too emotional, your rivals say you are too reckless, what is your self-image?

I'm highly emotional. I cannot accept injustice. I shoot my mouth off. I'm not cautious in that sense. I'm not mature. I want to be, but have not succeeded so far. It's quite confusing, because as a little girl I was called a *buddhi*. My grandfather says I was too wise, too understanding and he admonished me for not behaving my age. Perhaps, that's why I'm regressing now.

Your performances prove contrary.

It's selective behaviour, being a part and parcel of the film industry. Stardom matures you, gets you acquainted with the highs and the lows. You are constantly at sea with emotions, with changing equations. Till the end, you don't know what's working for you or against you... It's the only place that provides ample opportunities for travelling, for meeting different people from different walks of life. Showbiz in true sense is a roller-coaster ride.

And what have you learnt from your colleagues?

(Thinks) Let's see... From Shah Rukh Khan I've learnt total conviction. He believes that he can get whatever he desires and therefore desires the best. He has proved this with the best roles, awards and banners in such a short span. From Aamir Khan, I've learnt discipline. He concentrates on hardwork, not results. He is self-righteous and will not compromise for smal term gains. From Salman, the only think I've learnt is not to be brattish.

What is the best advice anybody has given you?

Shekhar Kapur said to me during *Dushmani*, don't be stubborn like a rock, you will get stuck. Flow like water, you will move on... I've remembered that.

What's the best compliment anyone has given you?
(Thinks) Can't remember.

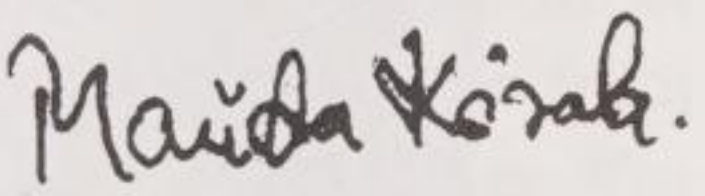
Do people often tell you that you are beautiful?
(Blushes) Sometimes.

Are you aware of it?
(Blushes) No, no...

What do you feel when you look into the mirror?
Here goes another day.

❀❀

'It's the first time I read an interview about myself without any feeling of embarrassment or persecution. It holds no contradiction with my self-image and for a change, the interview attempts to understand the person without the baggage of scandals.'



(Manisha Koirala)

2001

URMILA MATONDKAR

In a career spanning over a decade, Urmila Matondkar has played a variety of roles and dabbled with different kinds of films, but at the end of the day, for some mysterious reasons, Urmila is never given credit for even a single of her achievements. If, years ago, it was Jugal Hansraj who grabbed all the attention in Masoom, *costume designer Manish Malhotra was given credit for* Rangeela. Satya *was attributed to director Ram Gopal Varma,* Daud *to her co-star Sanjay Dutt,* Kaun *to the script and the haunted bungalow and now* Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya *to the cameraman and the choreographer. What is it about Urmila Matondkar that everytime she comes close to a milestone, laurels seems a few furlongs away. In a heart-to-heart chat, Urmila argues that if everytime someone else is the reason for her success then why blame her for the failures.*

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What made you say 'yes' to Riya's role in Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya?

Early in my career I decided that I would do all kinds of roles and, to a great extent, I've attempted that right from my first film *Narsimha* to my last release *Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya*. What fascinates me about Riya is that she is a strange, almost mysterious girl and, yet, beneath her so called bravado, she is vulnerable and almost childlike. When she is happy, she is normal, but when unhappy, she is distraught. She is also self-destructive. As an actress I felt that it would be interesting to portray her process of deterioration.

It must be quite disturbing playing a role like this?

No, because when you essay roles, you analyze characters clinically. Besides, there are shades of grey in all of us. Forget about complete character assasinations, if you review just a day in your life you will realise that out of the 20 things one thinks or does, ten are good, five bad and the rest evil. It's why you do what you do and the interpretation of these inconsistencies that makes human beings interesting.

Would you say you are a method actor?

I wish I was, but I'm not. I'd say I'm a disciplined actor. I need guidance from my director, but I don't like being spoonfed. There are some actors who blossom with pampering. I'm shy of too much attention. I like having my

space to reflect and grow with my character. My focus in *Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya* was to make Riya likeable so that when the confilict occurs, the audience is bound to feel mixed emotions towards her.

And how do you accomplish that? Do you follow a role model?

Not consciously, but on a subconscious level, I'm sure I did. All of us need an ignition to start the machine. Some borrow from real life, some from other films and some from within them. Different actors deal with it differently. For me it is something so precious and private that elaborating any further would be like touching a dewdrop and destroying it.

Seriously, how realistic does the Pyaar Tune... ***situation seem to you. Have you ever known someone like Riya in real life?***

The situation is as realistic as *Satya, Kaun,* or *Jungle*. Today, in the urban society that we live in, we don't know what our next-door neighbour is doing. We don't know whether he is an honest man, a smuggler or a criminal. Until we saw *Jungle*, we didn't believe that any one of us could be kidnapped. Similarly, people fall in love and have different reactions to the experience. Some turn obsessive. Men don't wear any distinctive signs of marriage unlike women. If they wore a *mangalsutra* or *sindoor*, there would be lesser misunderstandings. Riya is misled because there are no warning signals and unfortunately, for the kind of person she is, she loses self-control. It's not an impossible situation at all. I seriously believe that there is a dormant Riya in all of us, wild and edgy, bursting to come out but strongly held in leash by our social norms.

What about Kaun?

Doing *Kaun* was like reading a Stephen King novel. Twenty pages at a stretch tells you about the psyche of the character and that's how the film has been shot as well. The camera looms over the large house, savouring each moment, until everyone in the audience feels as cold and frightened as the girl on the screen. Nobody realised but *Kaun* was the first instance when the protagonist does not have a name. Manoj Bajpai refers to her as 'Maam', but nobody knows her identity. Whether she is single, married, a Hindu, a Muslim or an alien.

How did the journey into cinema begin for you?
Very early, when I was a little child. *Baba*, my father, was involved with experimental theatre and I tagged along to watch worthy plays which I never understood. I remember the passionate discussions that followed after every performance though. Everyone seemed to feel so strongly. Probably the seeds were sown that early. *Masoom* was offered to me when I was in school and *Narsimha* when I was in college. After that one thing just led to another.

What were the other early influences on you?
Beside *aai* and *baba* and the values they imparted, I would say books mostly recommended by friends. I read Anna Karenina when I was very impressionable. The character is volatile and has nothing in common with my background, but I was rivetted. When I was a little older, I was introduced to Tolstoy, Chekov, Dostoevskey. DH Lawrence's Sons and Lovers also made a deep impact on me. I was cheated into reading Crime and Punishment by a friend and even though I fell asleep a couple of times while reading it, I completed the book.

You went to college briefly, didn't you?
Yes, to NM at Vile Parle. I was majoring in Psychology when N Chandra offered me *Narsimha*. For quite a long time, I tried balancing studies and films but eventually gave up college. Ever since, I guess, I'm making up through books, cinema and life.

Of all the films you've done so far which would you say has been the most difficult?
In terms of physical discomfort and deprivation of basic amenities I would say *Jungle*. Today, when I think about it, I don't know how I went through the experience. For days and nights we were shooting in the thick of the forests, without food, electricity and any kind of human communication except that with the shooting unit.

After a while, everyone was tired of the same faces. Once I remember Fardeen and I got separated during shooting and found ourselves in different locations and as luck would have it we were entangled by thorn trees. It was so painful. We couldn't move until assistants came and untangled our clothes from the sharp thorns. Those were awful days. My dress, shoes and hair was full of dust and thorns. There was

no point shampooing my hair because it got dirty within moments. It was a nightmare walking through those dark bushes, watching out for the sign boards and even if one found them, one was not entirely secure because you never knew when an animal hiding in the dark would jump on you.

It must have been quite harrowing for your family as well.

Absolutely because one could hardly get through on the phone. Those few lucky times when we did, all they wanted to know was if I was alright. Fortunately, they didn't know the enormity of the problem because they were not there amidst us, but when they saw the film, my mother panicked. When the film was completed and we returned home, for a long time we missed the jungle. We had been there so long, it had become a part of our routine. But then I had missed the haunted house of *Kaun* as well. I was familiar with its every nook and cranny.

How involved do you get with a film?

I like to give suggestions if the director is open to them but respect the fact that eventually the director is the boss. We actors are merely vehicles, transcending our emotions. Ultimately only the film-maker knows the story and he tells it from the top angle. Interestingly, except for Ram Gopal Varma with whom I've done a couple of films, I have done maximum number of films with debut directors which includes Anupam Kher. I'm there in his forthcoming film, *Om Jai Jagdish*, a family drama about three brothers, their wives and their adjustments in a joint family.

Does this mean that we are going to see you again draped in sarees all the time?

No, no, Fardeen and I are the middle couple of the large family headed by Waheeda Rehman. We are living abroad, so luckily, I get to dress in clothes I'm comfortable in. I have nothing against sarees but I don't feel comfortable being draped in them all the time. I wore them in *Judaai*, but I can't imagine wearing them in real life. But then in real life I'm never going to purchase a huband with a wad of notes either!

But you can shop for a husband with a pot of love, surely.

I can, but I don't want to, atleast, not as of now. Marriage is

not a message in a bottle that I'm going to suddenly discover while walking on a seashore. That may happen in films but not in real life. It's not as if I can walk into a supermarket and get myself a groom. It will happen when it has to and I wish people will stop hounding me with the question. They did it to Madhuri Dixit and now me. Don't they realise it's an invasion on my privacy.

What other questions are you tired of answering?
Questions relating to my figure. No matter where I go, formal or informal functions, women don't think twice of asking me how I remain fit. It's vain after a point to be asked or to be elaborating on the same topic. Besides, if truth has to be revealed, I would like to make it clear that I'm not an exercise freak and I don't diet. I eat like a pig. When I'm at shows I'm embarrassed to fill my plate with a mountain of food while my collegues nibble on raw salads.

Would you say that success aiters relationships within the family?
I haven't experienced it. I'm treated the same way at home as I was many years ago by my friends and family to the extent that sometimes I feel my family is a bit too cool. They don't seem to be impressed by anything I do. They've never lavished praises on me for any of my performances and when outsiders do so, they look genuinely surprised.

It must be lonely at home now with your younger sister married?
Yes, I'm used to her presence in the house, and we've always been together wherever we went. Anyway, now that she has shifted to her new house which is close by, we are all the time hopping into each others' homes. Her in-laws are like family to me because she is married to my best friend's brother. These days, however, we are all very excited because my sister-in-law is expecting her first baby.

I didn't know you had a brother.
A lot of people don't. Kedar is the eldest of us three and serving with the Air Force. It's an old habit with me not to divulge more information than necessary, particularly about my family.

You sound cautions.
I wasn't before but I have became cautious over the years. I

guess it's a part of being in this profession. On the one hand showbiz enhances your personality, gives you wings, to fly, and on the other hand, it restricts your spontaneity. It's necessary and the only way to protect yourself.

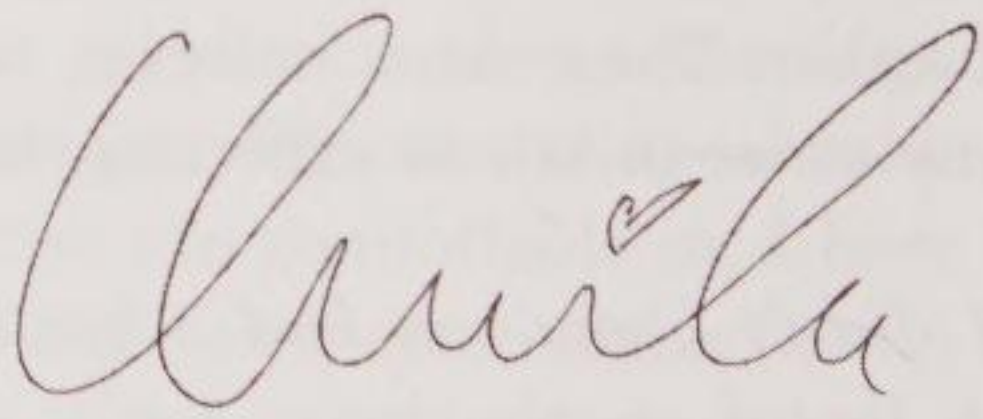
What else has stardom taught you?
I've learnt by watching others that stardom isn't about throwing tantrums but working upon your talent and improving with every film. Actors should be the least judgemental of people considering they are constantly delving into other characters. We must, on the contrary, always make concessions for another person's perspective.

Showbiz sees you as a sex symbol, what is your self image?
Someone who has no false illusions about herself, but if other people do, I will not go out of my way to change that.

That's very confident.
I think it's just very honest. At heart I'm a simple Maharashtrian girl who leads an uncomplicated life and after a tired day's work, like being with the family and relishing her *varan bhaat*.

❀❀

'This was soon after the release of *Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya*. The media had dismissed the film and the performance, something I have got used to over the years. Personally, however I felt satisfied with my performance and the line of questions made me introspect and regain my self worth. Irrespective of the reviews and absence of awards, *Pyar Tune...* and *Kaun* will remain special for me for I know it wasn't easy to project the complexities.'



(Urmila Matondkar)

2001

AMITABH BACHCHAN

Out of the 100 odd films Amitabh Bachchan has starred in the last 30 years, only 14 films star him as a police inspector. Quite a revelation for an actor forever accused of repetition. And what's further noteworthy is that even these characters differ in concern and content. In short, far from the stereotype that the critics have accused him of in the last three decades. In this extraordinary analytical interview, the mega star in a mellow mood on the sets of Vipul Shah's All The Best, *reflects on what he offered to the characters as an actor and what he gained from them as a human being...*

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Did you visit a police station or meet up with a real life police inspector when you were working on Zanjeer ***as a case study?***

No, I just followed the script and my instincts. And that's how it has been all these years. The beauty of working with Salim-Javed was that being performers themselves, they worked to the actor's advantage. Of course the silences, the pauses and the emotional gaps had to come from the performer but it wasn't so difficult because the magical moments were all there on paper.

Granted that there is an inherent anger in the script of Zanjeer, ***but how did you absorb that into your body language?***

As you know, I was an out of work actor those days. When I was narrated the subject, I was drawn to the role instantly. What was appealing about the character was that despite his seething anger and the justifications of a turbulent past, his demeanour is so calm. That is why his outbursts make such a strong impact. There was no conscious effort on my part to adopt a particular body language. Whether it was pushing the chair or threatening the don, it was all in the script.

Zanjeer is probably the only inspector role when you wore your hair really short. Whose decision was that?

It was my decision but after discussions with the director and the script writers. It was easy for me to have a special hair-cut because I wasn't doing any other films at that time so there were no problems of continuity.

Four years later, as the cop in Great Gambler, ***you are suave and flirtatious. The film was also your first double role. How did you differentiate between the two characters?***

In this film I played an officer in plain clothes and this was more because of commercial reasons than because the script demanded it. There were no marked differences in the appearances of the two characters. Except for their wardrobe and their leading ladies, they were very alike. But I guess, in formula films, part of the charm of doing double roles is to create confusion over identities. The audience loves it! As an actor, all I was worried about was whether the film would work at the box-office. Beyond that, I have to admit, there was no serious introspection involved as a performer.

Isn't that strange considering that the role of the police inspector has kept springing back at you all through your career like a jack-in-the-box?

It is strange but at that time one didn't view it in this context. One was only relating to the characters in a larger perspective, in the context of the whole film rather than just narrowing it down to his profession or background. The message of all my cop films was always bigger than the protagonist.

Does this include Parvarish ***and*** Ram Balram ***too?***

Most certainly. You cannot dispute the social message or morality of both these films. *Parvarish* was unusual in the sense that I played the adopted son following in the footsteps of his foster father while the biological son (Vinod Khanna) grows up to become a smuggler. The film tried to drive home the fact that environment plays a bigger role in breeding than genes. It was the same with *Ram Balram*. Dharmendra and I were reared by a wicked uncle and abused by him for vested interests. We didn't realise the damage till much later. Both the films were not so much about crime and justice as about family and relationships.

The cop in Dostana ***is seemingly self-assured in love and his career, but when relating to his friend, suffers low self-esteem. Do you believe that friendship is more important than love?***

It is unfair to equate real life with the world of make-belief. Such things happen only with us actors. Because of the nature of our work we are vulnerable victims of perceptions.

My professional ethics can only dictate to me what's to be done on the sets. Beyond that it is my prerogative, I don't owe it to anyone to articulate my thought processes.

But do you agree that certain roles create a conflict of ideology for an actor?

But of course, and it is for the performer to define his creative ground rules. There are many actors who find it difficult to go against their ideological/social/political/moral stand in their portrayals. In such cases it is important that they chalk out the boundary line. The guidelines about what they will do or they will not do as part of their contract.

And what is your boundary line? The sensitive areas you will not cross as an actor?

I have, from the very beginning, decided that I will not to do kissing scenes and even though, over the years, there have been several occasions when the scene demanded it, I have refrained myself from kissing my co-star. Not because I'm moralistic or consider those who do so less virtuous, but because I'm uncomfortable doing such a scene. Similarly, I disagree with the theory that anybody who does action films is necessarily an angry man in real life as well or that he indirectly propogates violence.

What other areas are taboo for you?

Nudity. And certain unspoken areas which if I treaded I would feel that my sensibilities as a human being were being offended.

Can you be more specific?

This is an indirect example but relevant to the discussion. We were shooting the climax of *Deewar*. I was on the run with Shashi Kapoor chasing after me. The original script demanded that he fire three bullets at me. During the take however, Shashi reasoned, that it went against his sensibilities to fire three bullets at a man who is unarmed and who is also his brother. Shashi argued that just one fatal firing was sufficient. There was a discussion and eventually Shahsi had his way. I guess, if an actor is gravely affected by something and altering it would not really affect the screenplay, his sentiments should be respected.

What was your thought process when you playing a triple role in Mahaan-***that of an introverted cop trapped between an idealistic father and an entertaining twin.***

The effort was to make all three of them as different as possible and at the same time, because they shared the same genes, retain some similarities. As a result the father was stern and upright but he had a funny side to him as well. One of the twin inherits his father's humour and the other his serious temperament. The problem with doing a triple role is that at any given time there were at least two characters in the frame. As a result you are not just dealing with their physical traits (the beard or the moustache) but also emotional character traits. While staging the scene, one had to be careful of timing and most important, the eye-contact. So once we had decided on the shot division, we would record the entire scene with movements. Then, before every shot, the sound track would be played back and the actor would lip synch like we do in songs. That took care of the movements. We ensured that I maintained the right eye-contact by fixing on an immovable property amongst the props. For instance, sketching a pair of eyes on a curtain or a chair. Despite this, there were moments when I felt dissatisfied with my performance. But then there I am over critical.

Do you think singing-dancing cops like the ones you played in Geraftaar ***or*** Inquilaab ***exist in real life?***

Why not? Cops are human beings too and have their strong and weak moments. There's no harm in singing and dancing. In *Inquilaab* the ultimate goal of the officer was to wipe out corruption from the country. In the process he had to sacrifice some personal relationships, but he was prepared for it. It was painful but for him the country is bigger than personal triumphs. It was a noble thought and I definitely believe that such characters exist in real life. The hero wanted to become the Chief Minister not for personal gains but because that was the only way he could clean up the system.

In Aakhri Raasta ***you opposed your father cold-bloodedly. If a situation like this occurred in real life would you be able to rise above personal attachments for the sake of duty?***

Again we are getting into areas where comparisons though

inevitable are unfair. I don't let the characters I play take over my life. Besides, the film demanded that the son oppose his father. However, it was not so much about the conflict between a father and his son as between a criminal and a cop. The reasons for the father turning into a criminal were not enough to redeem him. Justifications for crime do not make you innocent. And yes, duty is sacroscant because like personal relationships it involves a commitment too.

The common reaction to Shahenshah ***where the corrupt cop finally comes into his own, was 'wow'! Any reflections on society while playing this roll?***

The film came close on the heels of the 1988 political elections that I contested so unconsciously, it reflects the influences of my various interactions with my constituency members during that period. The original role wasn't written like the way it turned out but I thought that if we used the *avadhi* dialect, the character would work as a sharp contrast to the super powerful, vigilant hero. What was interesting about these portrayals was that even the buffoon cop was not real. He was only impersonating, biding his time before revealing his real identity.

Comparatively, Indrajeet, Akayla ***and*** Insaaniyat ***were not that effective. Where do you think you went wrong?***

Usually roles are remembered depending on the box-office success of the film. It's not as if these characters had nothing new to offer. They did. The heroes began as losers and emerged winners eventually. In *Indrajeet*, I donned the disguise of a young man to avenge my daughter's murder, while in *Akayla* I accomplished my mission despite being expelled from the police force. The point the film tried to make was that it is not always possible to fight the system from within the legislation and unless you destroy the root cause, the problem keeps coming back. The senior officer endorsing the hero's actions due to lack of proof was a new expression on the Indian screen. *Insaaniyat* was only a guest appearance. The film is a blur now.

Looking back was it boring to be dressed in the same uniform time and again?

No, because everytime the measurements kept changing. And to try and avoid monotony, the script concentrated as much on the officer's social life so he had the excuse of being attired in normal clothes.

After playing a cop and wearing the uniform in so many films, how informed would you say you are about the ranks in the police force?

Not much unfortunately. We tried to be as authentic as possible but I'm sure there must have been areas where we went wrong. The closest we got to autheticity was with *Major Saab* and that was because the costumes were personally supervised by the Defence Academy.

What about the officer's trademark stick. Hasn't the stick become something of a cliche?

There were times when the stick helped a scene but yes, you're right, the prop by itself has become somewhat cliched. It calls for a lot of imagination on the part of the actor to use it effectively each time and after a point, no matter how differently one is using it, it appears the same. And that's the time to get away with it completely.

In Bade Miyan Chote Miyan ***Govinda and you played a pair of twins. Any interesting annecdotes related to the film?***

The film was a fun caper and I played the older of the duo. The most significant part of the characterisation was that everytime we played the buffoons, our performances had to go delibearately over the top. The film was a juxtapositioning of situations and emotions leading up to a hilarious climax.

And Aks, ***how would you compare it to the other 14 films in which you played a police officer?***

In *Aks* I play my age. In this film I have a senior officer above me who's on the verge of retirement, and a junior colleague assisting me on the case. The character has his idiosyncracies and his ideologies. He is a normal, happily married man with a child until an untoward incident changes the course of his life. He is assigned to nab a serial killer who's committed a string of heinous crimes. The film deals with paranormal experiences. But it's not exactly about spirits. We are talking of the soul. It's part of our ethos. That's why we pray for the departed soul and believe that the body may go, but the soul remains. In packaging, content and my appearances, the role I think stands apart from the cops I've played in my previous films.

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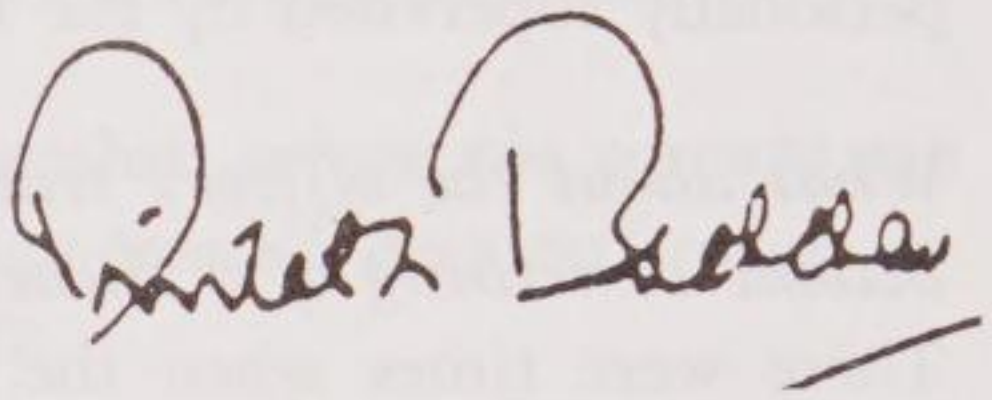
'Personally, I think there are four essential features to an interview. The content, which includes the nature of the questions asked. The structure, which emphasizes the graph of the interview. Integrity, as to how honestly the quotes are reproduced and finally, the spirit of the conversation. In this case, I have never felt let down on either of these points.'



(Amitabh Bachchan)

2001

REKHA

When I enter her office, she is sitting with her back to the door, staring at the sea and its wild waves. She pulls up a chair besides me and invites me to share the moment with her. 'Isn't it beautiful... it resembles a frame from a Santosh Sivan film,' she says wistfully.

As the big orange sun dips into the ocean, the skyline changes colour and subsequently so does her mood. Quite like Rekha's own career. Everytime it seems as if the actress is close to the end, she springs back, with a Khoon Bhari Maang, *an* Aastha *and a* Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi. *After 30 years in the arc lights and 100 odd films, Rekha still looks ravishing and has the capacity to surprise her audience.*

In this heart-to-heart interview Rekha discusses why Lajja *has been an enriching experience for her as an actress.*

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Lajja *isn't the regular formula film. So what motivated you to say 'yes' to the role?*

The fact that the director was completely convinced with the subject motivated me as an actress. From the very first day when he met me to the final narration, his passion and concern for the issue remained undiminished. Everyone knows that the film is inspired from a real life incident. But just how deeply he was affected by the episode, was revealed only when we began shooting the film. I think it was an instinctive decision for me.

Is that how you usually make your decisions, relying on your instincts?

That's how I usually do it, yes. Of course, there are other considerations as well. If it is a director I've already worked with like Guddu (Rakesh Roshan) I don't need much coaxing because I trust him. It didn't take me long to say 'yes' to Guddu's forthcoming *Koi Mil Gaya*. In that sense, it should have taken me longer to agree to *Lajja* because I haven't seen any of Raj Santoshi's earlier films.

None at all?

None, not even *Damini*. But I'm planning to see all his films now. I remember him as a shy assistant following Govind Nihalani around during the making of *Vijeta*, holding on to

his shirt and whispering into his ear. Nobody heard him utter a word during the entire making of the film, so you can imagine how dumbfounded I was at his clairvoyant, almost visual narration of the subject to me. He told me he was depicting the five faces of Sita. The five phases in a woman's life. And the way he elaborated on each character, emphasising every issue was quite enthralling. He had worked out an unusual graph for the film, the journey of one woman. But all the four women he's portrayed – Vaidehi, Maithili, Janaki and Ram Dulari – were equally fascinating.

When there were so many options, what made you opt to play Ram Dulari?

I was more drawn to Janaki the role played by Madhuri Dixit but the director felt that I should play Ram Dulari because I was most appropriate to represent the opening outcry *'Amma humko bachai le ye dushman humka phuk de...'* his inspiration and reason for making the film. That was the director's projection of me. I wasn't completely convinced but I consoled myself that while I had done shades of Janaki in my earlier films, this was a new expression and a new challenge for me as an actress.

When does the process of acting begin for you? When you listen to the story or when you begin shooting?

I'm not a method actor. Earlier, because I was young and indifferent towards my work and later, because I felt becoming too aware would take away the magic. Acting for me has always been more of a spontaneous reaction. Eventually, the moment of truth for all actors is 'Start Camera'. Whatever artistes go through prior to this is all happening at a subconscious level. It could be something I've watched from my car window or a film I've stored in my memory over the years. It's different each time and difficult to explain. A few weeks before the shooting of *Lajja* when I asked the director to describe his vision of Ram Dulari to me, he counter-questioned me with, 'I know my vision. I'm keen to know what's going on in your head.'

And what was going on in your head?

To be honest, I was nervous because I had never played a rural woman, never spoken *avdhi* dialect in its purest form. The innumerable research material provided by the director

really helped. He had travelled extensively in the interiors and had sufficient information to satisfy my queries. For our mutual benefit, we did a test shoot. After that I think he felt reassured and left me alone till the day of the shooting.

Were there any disputes during the test shoot?
Not disputes but there were healthy discussions. I was carrying with me both, bright and dull coloured sarees. He discarded all the brighter shades and settled for the dull ones. I had plastered my hair with oil to give it a rustic look. He asked me to leave it the way it was. His explanation being, '*hawa chal rahi hai na...* then let the hair fly.' Something just resolved for me during that shoot and after that I just surrendered to him as an actress.

Do you usually surrender so easily?
I'm obedient. It comes out of not going through any kind of formal education. So for me the film-maker is the teacher and the studio, my school. There are actors who get unsettled when directors enact a scene for them. I take it as an indicator. I distill the moment and absorb what's advantageous to me. Over the years, I have learnt to distance myself from clichés.

What's your mind frame on the first day of a new film?
I'm anxious and edgy but on the surface I appear calm and unaffected. An actor about to get under the skin of a new character is like a bride adopting a new family in an arranged marriage. You are being watched under a microscope, judged by everyone and all the time. It can be very unnerving! And for some sadistic reason, the director always picks up the most crucial scene to shoot on the first day. It's happened with my earlier films and it happened with *Lajja* as well. They probably do it deliberately, to get full steam into the film. Or perhaps to ensure that the actor does not get complacent.

What were you thinking about when you did the brow-beating scene?
I was thinking about the complete helplessness and the exasperation of the character. Ram Dulari is doomed and she knows it. Only a sensitive person who cannot inflict violence on others and cannot cope with her own frustration, would

browbeat in that manner. It is a very disturbing moment in the film and an equally disturbing moment for me as a performer.

To what extent do traumatic scenes like these affect the individual?

Personally it does not affect me any longer because after so many years, one is able to switch on and off. However, the yelling and the shrieking gets to you after a while because the voice turns hoarse and everyone is worried if the result can be accomplished in dubbing. The climax shot in the film is also my last shot in the film. We had been shooting all night and had to complete the scene before the sun came up. Originally, Santoshi had conceived the sequence differently. Then, at the last minute, he changed his mind and shot it within the space and the props available. And, as fate would have it, everything fell into place. Santoshi is an easy director in the sense that he gives a long rope to his actors and does not suffocate them to do the scene his way. That's quite liberating. He watches the effect and if it works for the better, does not interrupt.

Tell us about the rape scene?

It's too private for me to elaborate on but just knowing that someone is lusting for you is humiliating. Men will never be able to understand the feeling because they've never been raped. They suffer a minor loss in business and fantasize jumping off their windows. While rape victims go on with their lives despite the tragedy.

From a don in Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi ***to a princess in*** Zubeidaa ***to a mid-wife in*** Lajja. ***What's next?***

Anything. I'm ready for any role of any length, to play any character. I'm even willing to play a man, change my walk and voice, provided the director is confident enough to take the risk.

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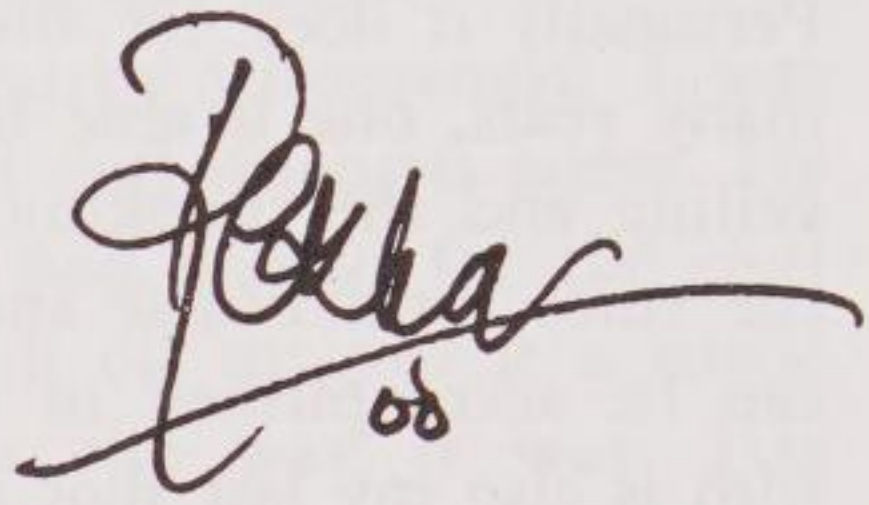
'This is the first time I've worked in a film and I felt like speaking about it. The first time I understand what activists attached to a cause they feel strongly about go through. The first time I identify with their passion for a crusade. Until now, I was oblivious of all this, but *Lajja* made me aware of how important it is to bond with my own sex. It is a pity

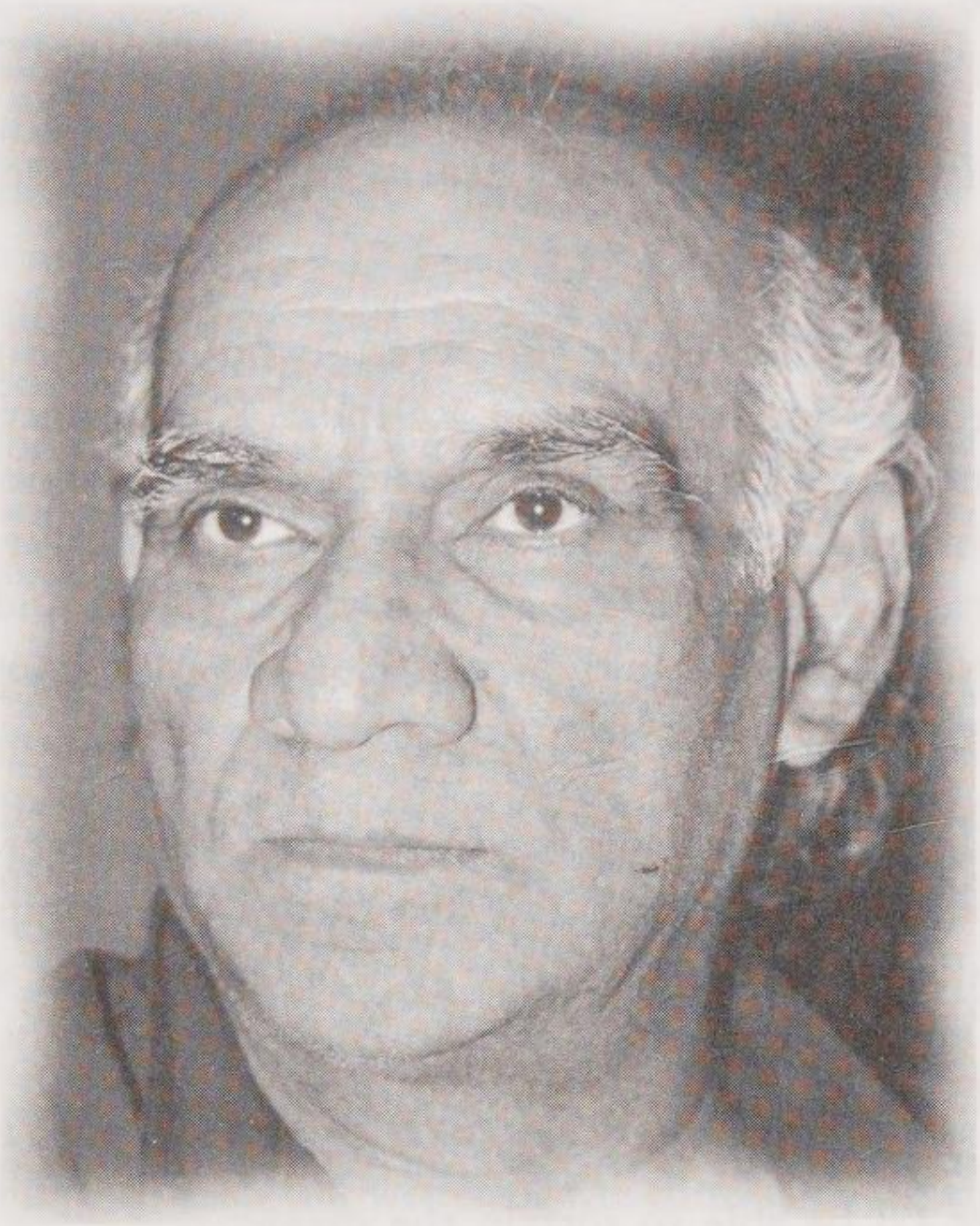
the film didn't do well for it is as significant for the men as the women. It's time men get acquainted with their women's feelings and it's time women collectively celebrate their womanhood.'



(Rekha)

2001

YASH CHOPRA



Out of the 18 films that Yash Chopra has directed in his four-decade-long career, nine were full-fledged love stories, six family dramas, two formula films and only one, a suspense thriller. Chopra goes down memory lane tracing how every film was born.

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Dhool ka Phool was about an unwed mother succumbing to societal pressures and abandoning her child. A noble man enters her life, offers to marry her and accept the baby. The song *'Tu Hindu banega na Musalman banega...'* picturised on Manmohan Krishnan, is an immortal tribute to anti-communalism, particularly relevant in today's turbulent times. The story idea was *bhaisaab*'s (B.R. Chopra) and in keeping with the BR banner tradition of socially relevant films. Pandit Mukhram Sharma, an unusually systematic writer of his times, wrote the screenplay. The lighter moments were my inputs. I lent a philosophic touch to the romance.

Rajendra Kumar is in the wrong and Mala Sinha the wronged. Nanda, the woman Rajendra Kumar marries, the innocent, but recipient of her partner's crime. Ashok Kumar, the most important character of the quadrangle, is the crusader. I was only 26 when I made this film and had to brief Nanda about child birth. 'How do you know about delivery, you've never been pregnant?' she asked.

The film was a runaway success. For the silver jubilee function, we went to Hooghly and there was a stampede. We were asked to come out on the theatre balcony and wave out to the audience. As far as the eye could see, there were only faces. It seemed like the whole city had come out. It was a terrifying feeling. I was scared of the future, scared of whether I'd be able to sustain the magic.

Dharam Putra is based on a novel by Chatursen Shastri reflecting on the perils of the Partition. A Muslim girl gets pregnant and gives away her child to her Hindu neighbour. The child grows up to be a fanatic, hating the rival community. When the truth is revealed, he suffers an identity crisis.

It was the most controversial film of the time and both the

communities threatened to burn down the theatres. The exhibitors weren't willing to release the film and to give them confidence, Shashi Kapoor, Deven Verma and I sat in the manager's room for all the shows everyday, but the box-office returns weren't encouraging. I was feeling very low those days and remember attending a film function where coincidentally everyone had something to say about the film. Prithviraj Kapoor, Meena Kumari, Mehboob Khan, but most of all it was Dilip Kumar who gave me heart! He sensed that I was low and took me out in his car. We drove aimlessly on the streets of Mumbai till the early hours of morning. I don't remember what he said, but his words provided me solace. When I returned home, I learnt that we had won the National Award for the Best film. This is some consolation after the rejection of the film at the box-office.

Waqt was about a family separated in an earthquake, the first lost-and-found film. It was written by Akhtar Mirza, writer of several hit films and the father of Saeed and Aziz Mirza. Our original casting was Prithviraj Kapoor and his three sons – Raj, Shammi and Shashi. Papaji (Prithviraj) was enchanted by the idea, but wanted to reserve the novel casting for their own banner. Then Bimal Roy, a dear friend of *bhaisaab* dissuaded him, saying that a casting so real would break the illusion. He was right.

We retained Shashi Kapoor and signed Sunil Dutt for the middle brother after Rajendra Kumar had declined the role because he was doing a similar role in LV Prasad's *Beti Bete*. Raj Kumar who had earlier dropped out of *Dhool Ka Phool* because he had reservations about working with a new director, was confirmed for the role of the eldest brother, on the condition that there would be no discussions on the sets. Any query on his role or character would be dealt with off the sets directly with the writer of the film. And we stuck to that agreement.

Waqt was the first colour film of BR banner and I think it was very generous of *bhaisaab* to give me the opportunity to direct it despite my two earlier flops. The film had sprawling sets and elaborate costumes, two consistent factors in all my films. Dress designer Bhanu Athaiya, Sadhana and I personally shopped for Sadhana's wardrobe.

A few days prior to the release, there was a black-out in the

country. Those were the days of the Indo-China aggression and the audience wasn't entertainment inclined. Well-wishers advised me to delay the release, but the prints were already delivered. Finally, with the help of an Air Marshall friend, I managed to retrieve the reels and a few weeks later, when the political clouds had cleared, we released the film.

It was the first multi-starrer and got a stupendous opening. On the morning of the release, we performed a *havan* at home, a tradition practiced to this day. The entire unit was present. From there, we went to a press show at Naaz Theatre followed by lunch where all my artistes played hosts. A while later, we met up again at the premiere. The men were dressed in identical suits, tailored from a common fabric. The women were in white. After the show, we travelled to Hotel Sun'n'Sand, drank till late night and dined at dawn. At 5 a.m. all of us jumped into the swimming pool, not bothering about whether we had spare clothes or not. Soaked to the skin, we drove to a local restaurant for tea. Our party wasn't over yet. We then drove to a newspaper vendor and purchased the new copy of *Screen*, delighted to read the news of the premiere. Such camaraderie can never be regained.

Ittefaq was done as a quickie. When we were at the tail end of the shooting of *Aadmi Aur Insaan*, I felt that the climax needed to be reshot, but unfortunately Saira Banu was in London, undergoing a surgery and had no dates. We had no choice but to wait for her. During this long break, we went to see a Gujarati play, *Dhumas*. We were so impressed by it that the next day we went to see the play again with our entire story department. *Ittefaq*, a suspense thriller was scripted in seven days and shot in 28 days in chronological order. Edited and mixed simultaneously, the film was released within a record three months.

The film had a number of firsts to its credit. It was the first non-song, two-hour Hindi film to be released without an interval. Our first choice for the heroine was Raakhee, but she was under a contract with the Rajshris for *Jeevan Mrityu*. Nanda got to hear of the role from her brother-in-law who was working with us and offered herself. We needed someone with a traditional image and signed her on. Rajesh Khanna was under a contract with the United Producers and so available to us.

On the last day, I still remember, I shot for 28 hours at a stretch and when I went home, I was exhausted, but I couldn't sleep because I was so excited.

Aadmi aur Insaan: By the time *Ittefaq* had released and was celebrating a successful run, Saira Banu was back from London and we took up from where we had left off. Our original idea of the film was corruption in the public sector. At the time we had thought of a dam bursting, but later, we altered the public sector angle to weave the plot around two friends, one honest, the other dishonest.

Mumtaz wasn't a conventional heroine, beautiful but not traditional. As the film grows however you discover that she has a heart too. It's just that her priorities are different. Emotions are the same all over. It's how you say what you feel that makes the difference.

Daag: I had just got married and moved out of my brother's nest. I was keen on launching my own banner and had met author, Gulshan Nanda, who had an interesting subject. While on my honeymoon, I thought of a unique treatment for the film and discussed it with Nanda on my return. He approved of it instantly. I summoned my creative team and we got cracking. Three friends stood by me like a rock, Sharmila Tagore, Rajesh Khanna and Raakhee. Raakhee returned my signing amount, saying, 'Keep it as a loan, return it to me when your film is a hit.'

Daag was a libellous subject and we expected problems with the censors, but they gave us a clear certificate. While I was returning, Rajesh Khanna was on a horse making his way to his wedding *mandap*. The distributors were sure that the film would fail and released it with just 11 prints in Mumbai. Almost a dozen of Khanna's films had flopped in a row and they predicted doom! But within just four days, 18 more prints were ordered. The film got an unprecedent opening.

Deewaar: One day Salim-Javed narrated a subject about a dock worker who becomes a don. Inspired from the life of the underworld don Haji Mastan, the story had a spark. Every detail you see in the film was in the script. *Deewaar* was a perfect screenplay with perfect casting, made at the most perfect time.

Essentially a family story of two brothers, the film also told the story of their beloveds. Amitabh, an out-law, is attracted to a call girl while Shashi Kapoor, a police officer, is involved with a girl from a good family. Their concerns and the undertones of their relationships are different. The brothers love their partners, but their first love is their mother.

Kabhie Kabhie was a love story I had been obsessed with for several years. I often wondered what happened to lovers married to different partners. Life could either be happy or a compromise. The film was about two such lovers, Amitabh and Raakhee. Raakhee married to Shashi Kapoor, lives happily, while Amitabh married to Waheeda Rehman, is a bitter man.

Amitabh played a poet. My distributors felt it was a mistake to cast him in such a role in the wake of *Deewaar*, but I didn't think so.

The wedding fever in cinema began with *Kabhie Kabhie*. The opening song is the crux of the story and the deflowering of the bride on the *suhaag raat* the ultimate erotica. The picturisation of that song that one talks about even after all these years was borrowed from a crude phrase - *nath utarna* - only I did it aesthetically. The first rush print had Amitabh in a long shot watching the couple take the nuptial rounds and with every round, there are inter-cuts of his fantasy with Raakhee. When I was re-recording however, my sound-recordist Mangesh Desai commented that it was too artistic and could be mis-interpreted. So we changed it to Raakhee visualising Amitabh lifting her veil during the song. I wanted her eyes to reflect the pain of her beloved and that is why I deliberately kept the camera angles in a way so Shashi could not see her face except in the end.

Trishul: This was again a film about an unwed mother, the story of an illegitimate son settling scores with his father. I was delving into a complex relationship and the mixed emotions the boy goes through, so understandably romance was not the focus of the story. The film is about the family, the other relationships are incidental.

During the making of the film, one day Gulshan Rai mentioned that Premji had suffered a big disaster, *Meera*.

Javed Akhtar, the writer of *Trishul*, who was present in the room, with characteristic humour said, That's because we've still to release *Trishul*...

Javed wasn't joking. We had shot more than three fourths of the film, but all of us agreed that something was amiss. We stalled shooting for a while, reworked the screenplay and reshot the film for almost 20-25 days. The change was worth it. Even Javed acknowledged that. He said that Salim and he should only partly be credited for the screenplay, as all of us had contributed to the screenplay of *Trishul*.

Kaala Patthar: We attach so much importance to the form that we often overlook the soul. I'm of the opinion that no matter how fabulous the structure, unless the soul is stirred, the audience isn't moved. *Kaala Patthar* lacked soul. We were flying high on our success. A number of hits in a row had swept us off our feet. We believed that whatever we touched would be successful. *Kaala Patthar* wasn't. The film had a terrific opening, but it wasn't a grosser. It wasn't a losing proposition either. *Kaala Patthar* was the victim of the star- system. My banner had a halo around it. I got carried away, hiring technicians from Hollywood for the special effects, but failed to capitalise on the charisma of a great star-cast.

Silsila: The film had inherent tensions because of the casting coup. If I was confident of the project, it was because all the three artistes had individually assured me that there would be no problems at their end. And they kept their word. It was the first film on extra-marital relationship and call it moral and societal pressures, but at the last minute, I developed cold-feet and thought that maybe the hero should come home to his wife. The original ended differently. When and why I changed the ending I don't know, but I did so because I felt that the audience wasn't ready. But the audience didn't accept what we gave them either.

The film is special because it has immortal moments. For Rekha's husband I wanted Sanjeev Kumar, but he wasn't willing. After *Sholay* and *Trishul* he wasn't willing to play second fiddle to a script that focussed on Amitabh Bachchan. He wasn't willing to even listen to the story, but I insisted and followed him to Bangalore. We were half-way through the narration and I was telling him of the restaurant scene

when Rekha and Amitabh take the dance floor and Sanjeev asked me to stop. He phoned his secretary to check his dates and said he was doing the film.

Mashaal: Originally, I wanted Kamal Haasan for the restless hero. We thought we would make him a South Indian character finding his bearings in Mumbai. When we spoke to him however, he declined, saying he wanted a role equal to Dilip Kumar's. Anil Kapoor was the star on the rise those days and we took a gamble. He was very excited with the offer, more so because it gave him the opportunity of working with Dilip Kumar. There were times he got carried away and Dilip Kumar had to take him aside and calm him down.

The immortal moment of the film is Waheeda Rehman's death and Dilip Kumar asking for help. We shot two versions of the scene over four days and eight shifts, but when you see the film you cannot tell the breaks. That's the brilliance of the actor. Shot at night at Ballard Pier, we had put up Dilip Kumar up at Hotel Taj to facilitate his travel. He was appreciative of the thoughtfulness, said his reflexes were slow and needed that much more time for recuperating.

Faasle: Sometimes the director turns obstinate and pays a price for it. *Faasle* was the price I paid for being stubborn. I was in the mood to make a film with newcomers. Then suddenly I had second thoughts about it and contacted Anil Kapoor. He had no dates, but promised to accommodate me. In the interim, I changed my mind again. Call it *vinaash buddhi* or destiny but the damage was done. Some blamed the debacle on Rohan Kapoor, some on the characterisation of Sunil Dutt. Critics said that no matter how bad the son-in-law, the father-in-law wouldn't whiplash him. The sad thing about a film's failure is that even the good things go unnoticed.

Faasle was about the seasons of love. Raj Kiran abuses his woman, despite the sanctity of marriage. Sunil Dutt nurtures his partner without the pressures of society. Farha is the abused one, and Rekha the recipient of undying love.

Vijay was a rehash of *Trishul*. In everyone's life there comes a phase when everything goes wrong. This was my phase and the films I made during this time are a proof of that. I'm

not proud of these films, but I cannot deny them since I made them. The only consolation being that everyone connected to the film made money. It set me thinking however and I made a promise to myself that no matter what the pressures, I would now only make films I believed in.

Chandni: Kamna Chander had given me a story on the basis of which I had signed Vinod Khanna, Sridevi and Rishi Kapoor. On the day of the *mahurat* however, as I peeped through the lens, a wave of depression overcame me. A premonition that I had made a mistake. Here were three dashingly good-looking stars and what I had in mind for them was an old-fashioned regressive story. Next day I told my writer and my artistes that I was changing the story. The first half was the same and since all dates were finalised, we left for the shoot abroad. On our return, I got the second half re-written, made it more vibrant. But even then, I wasn't completely satisfied. One day, as I was watching the final rushes and came to Vinod Khanna's entry, an action scene, I felt there was a bitter taste in my mouth. I contacted Vinod and Sri and told them that I wanted to reshoot the sequence. The office sequence when she bums a ride from him was an afterthought.

Chandni marked the saturation point of violence in films. The distributors didn't think so. One left my film because I changed Vinod's entry scene and another because he disapproved of the music. I was confident that they would come around.

Lamhe: The idea of a younger woman being in love with an older man and not being able to accept him marrying someone else had been haunting me for years. In my imagination the news of her death comes through a knock on the door. In the film we show her sinking in the hospital.

The film was shot in two schedules, London and Rajasthan. We shot the second schedule first. The novelty of the romance in *Lamhe* is that when the heroine is young, the hero is old and when the hero is young, the heroine older. Sridevi and Anil complemented each other beautifully, but the highlight of the film was the dialogue by Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza. They don't make writers like him any more.

Parampara was about the sacrifices our ancestors make to preserve tradition. Anil Kapoor was signed for the role but a few days before the shooting he backed out of the film. I was in conflict and contacted Vinod Khanna who was already upset with me for not getting to do *Lamhe*, and asked him to help me out. He could have refused, but he agreed. After that, there was a new problem. Ashwini Bhave riding high on the success of *Henna* and signed opposite Anil, wanted to opt out because Vinod Khanna fell into the older bracket of heroes. After that it was a chain of things going wrong. Ramaya's character belonging to a tribe of gypsies didn't make sense, but it was too late to change it. I continued shooting, though deep down I knew that the magic was missing. And the day I saw the first trial, I accepted that the film wouldn't work.

Darr was about obsessive love and what it can drive you to. Aamir Khan was my first choice for the role, then Ajay Devgan, Sanjay Dutt and finally, Shah Rukh Khan. When I called Shah Rukh over to my house I told him that it was a negative role. He told me that he was already doing two negative roles in *Baazigar* and *Anjaam* and narrated the plots of both. If my film offered him another shade he was willing to do it.

Shah Rukh's role was very small, but the impact of the character was tremendous. After the release of *Darr*, many women I met told me of similar traumatic experiences with their anonymous lovers.

Selective stammering was part of Rahul's characterisation. Rahul is a normal boy, but gets hysterical only when he mentions Kiran's name. When I saw the rushes I felt Shah Rukh had overdone the stammering, but he dissuaded me from altering it during the dubbing. 'You don't know what a powerful film you've made,' he said, and he was right. The audience applauds Sunny Deol for killing Shah Rukh, but in a strange, inexplicable way they are also attracted to the villain and mourn his death.

Dil to Paagal hai was conceived as a simple idea that there is someone for everyone. You have to only look for the symbols to recognise him. The original title of the film was *Maine Mohabbat Ki*. My son, Aditya felt that the title was too serious and we should either alter the story or the title. I

liked the plot of musical shows and didn't want to alter the subject, so we altered the title for a more breezy effect. Today, any other title seems inappropriate for the film.

This was my first film where the characters don't have a baggage of backgrounds, except perhaps for Madhuri, who is the most stable character in the film. Karisma's role was offered to many actresses but all of them turned it down. Kajol, Juhi, Urmila. When I met Karisma, I said to her, don't refuse outright. Think about it for 24 hours before you say 'no'. She said she didn't want to think. She said 'yes' right away and never regretted her decision.

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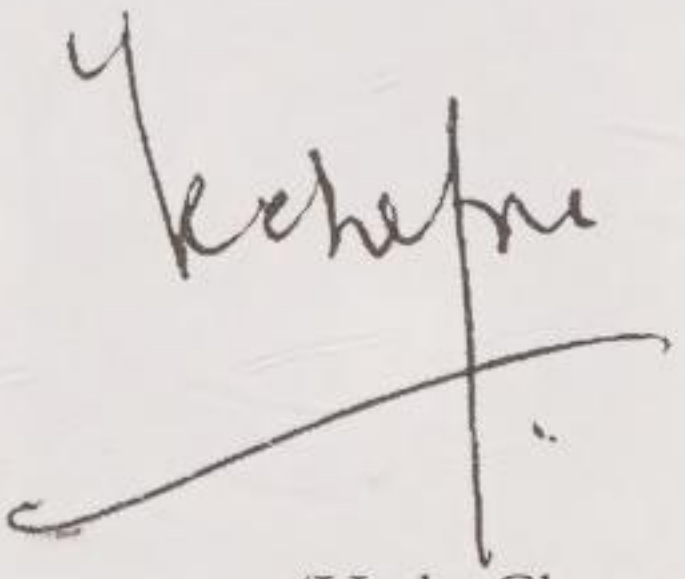
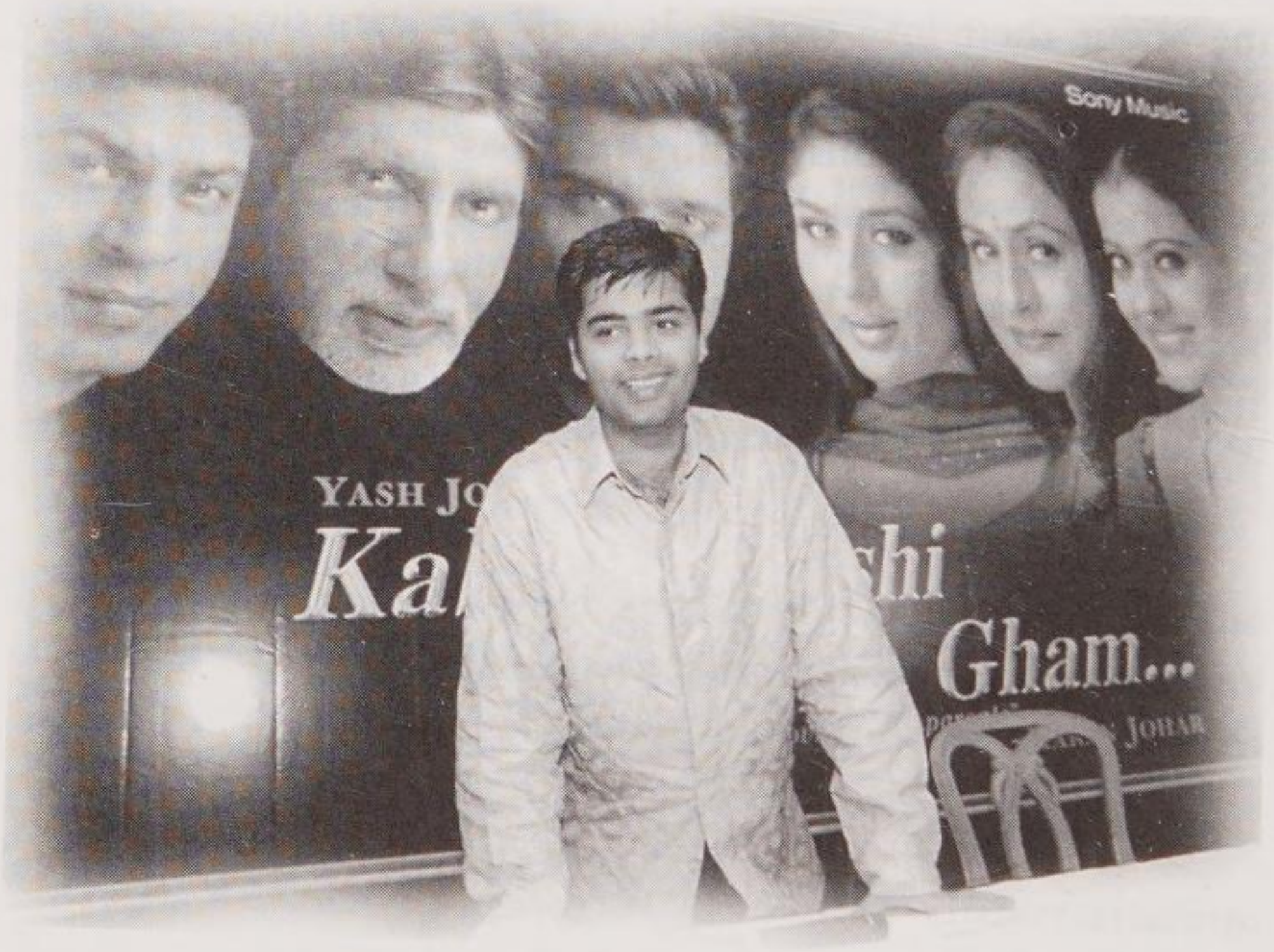
'Because of the films I make, everywhere I go, people tell me about their love stories. It is all very amusing and often quite embarassing. Eventually of course, a film-maker draws from his observations. Things he has watched stay in his subconscious. Recently, my son got married and as I was watching the various ceremonies we orgainsed for the event, I realised that my films have never reflected the same fragrance. I'm sure this is bound to influence my future projection.'



(Yash Chopra)

2001

KARAN JOHAR



When he was a little boy, he had made up his mind he was going to become popular. He did.

When he graduated, he had made up his mind he was going to become a part of showbiz. He did.

When he got success, he had made up his mind he was going to shed weight and acquire a new look. He did. In fact, he exploded the myth that those behind-the-scenes don't need to be fashion conscious.

When he made his second film, Karan Johar determind to redefine box-office rules. He did.

Unconsciously perhaps, but whatever Karan Johar dreamt of, came true.

On the eve of the release of his expected blockbuster, Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham, ***the young film-maker states that he feels like the Piped Piper carrying a battalion of stars wherever he goes.***

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You've said somewhere that with your first film you sought acceptance. And with your second film, you seek appreciation. How important is approval to you?
Extremely important. It always has been ever since childhood. I always wanted reassurance from my parents and friends. When I made my first film, even though I was very confident of my craft, I was still seeking approval. I know it's a contradiction but it's true. Maybe there is inside me a little boy who refuses to grow up and that is why I'm all the time so restless and hyper.

What could be the reason for you being on the edge?
Temperament, I guess. Even today when I finish a shot, I find myself watching the expressions of my assistants. If it's not what I'm expecting or even if their degree of involvement is slightly lesser than my expectation, it is an indicator to me that something is missing somewhere. After all, they are the first recipients of the content and if the scene leaves them unmoved, then the rest of the audience is going to be unmoved too.

But your hawk's eye can be unnerving, particularly for the actors.

Yes, but I don't reveal my neurosis to my actors. What I'm going through is a discreet, unobtrusive process of survival, more as a constructive than as a destructive exercise. Raising the comfort zone of my actors is my prime concern, and I wouldn't do anything to destroy their concentration. But at the same time I cannot deny my anxieties.

Which of your parent do you attribute this strong emotional base to?

My mother is so hypersensitive that my father and I refer to her as a tap. The slightest emotion triggers a flood of tears. Dad is sensitive too but unlike mom, he internalizes his emotions. His calm exterior is more of a defence and those close to him know when he is suffering. My father can be depended upon in a crisis and my mother on her perceptive nature. I pretend to be calm in the wake of a problem and have inherited the sixth sense from my mother. Something in the pit of my stomach always tells me when a happy or a sad moment is coming.

Is it true that as a child you decided one fine morning that you wanted to be in a boarding school?

That's true. I was 12 years old and in the 8th standard at that time. The idea came to me I think when I heard about Dimple aunty dropping Tina and Chinky to Panchgani. I was an awkward adolescent, all of 100 kilos and forever ridiculed by my building friends. They wouldn't include me in a football game, as a result, I still have a complex about sports. The only time I was allowed to participate was in the tug-of-war that to only to balance out the thinner people on the other side. It was a turbulent phase for me and the only way I could cope with the alienation was by burying myself in my textbooks. My mother had to constantly reprimand me to stop studying and go out and play, but I preferred staying indoors. I was a rare exception as a child perhaps who loved going to school and was excited about doing homework.

Why did you think that going to a boarding would solve all your problems?

I was so disillusioned with my building friends that I was looking for an escape. At that age, peer pressure can be immense. My parents accepted my decision. A grand

farewell party was organised but within three days of my arrival in my new surroundings, I realised that I didn't want to be there. On investigation I discovered that the only way a student can escape the premise was by rolling down the hill. So I rolled down the tall hill and bruised myself, picked up by the school security. My father was summoned on an SOS. I think the school was as relieved to see me return home as my mother was.

It must have been embarrassing. What about the reactions of your friends?

That's the interesting part. I was so happy to be home with my parents that I was suddenly free of all other baggage. My mother maintains even now that those three days I spent away from home was the turning point for me. She says I transformed dramatically after that. By the time I was in the 10th standard I was extremely popular at school and representing my college at inter-collegiate debates. It's strange how an adolescent can take a break, ponder over his life and return to his roots. It instills my faith in the theory that children know what they want and can resolve conflicts without adult intervention.

You've portrayed that in your debut film Kuch Kuch Hota Hai.

Yes, though I have to admit it happened unconsciously. Little Anjali makes her own decisions – what to shop for her father and where to spend her summer vacations. When she wants something, she's willing to manipulate her father, grandmother and even Salman Khan into shifting affection from Kajol to her favourite TV anchor. In the climax it's more her silent tears than the hero's that coerces Salman to eventually sacrifice his to-be-bride for Shah Rukh.

Would you agree that Kuch Kuch... ***is old values in a new bottle? Are you traditional or a liberal person?***

I think everything that is internalized like our basic values and sense of justice, everything relating to roots and family is traditional. Everything external, like our appearance and ambience, and everything we project is a culmination of influences gathered from what we read and watch. In my case, I feel I'm a product of cinema. I've grown up on a diet of Hindi films and all my reference points are Yash Chopra films. The subtext comes from Raj Kapoor and the packaging from Sooraj Barjatya and Aditya Chopra.

All these names gives one a feeling of déjà vu. ***Isn't it time for you to break the umbilical chord with Yashraj films?***
Yash Chopra would have been even a bigger influence on me were he not a part of the family. But with him being a father figure, I cannot be in awe of him. Intimacy does not permit adulation. Years ago, when I was still a child and had never seen him, only watched his films, I had stayed awake all night because he was coming home and I wanted to see the man who made those glorious films. When he finally arrived, I remember, I was so disappointed, I said to myself, 'But he looks like my father.' Even structurally, Pam aunty and uncle resemble my parents. Ours is an extended family, so it's not all that easy for me to break the umbilical chord.

Visually and musically you are forever borrowing from his films?
See, musically all of us are borrowing from some school or the other. Unless you have technically learnt music or can create your own notes, all film-makers have to borrow from somewhere. I admit that my visuals in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* seemed like a continuity of Yash Chopra films, but in my second film, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* I have deliberately broken from the mould. This time I have used warm tones and done away with vibrant colours and sporty wear.

Is it because you have outgrown the bubblegum phase too?
I feel older, more mature and my films can only reflect my mind frame. *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* was perhaps the first film that said that friends can be lovers. In *Kabhi Khushi...*, through simple moments that occur in every home, I'm connecting to humanity. Mira Nair has done that in *Monsoon Wedding*. When I saw the film I felt that I had known all the characters. The film-maker makes you feel a part of the main family. In my film I've touched upon a very simple but a very rare point. It urges you to demonstrate your emotions. It says, 'If you care, express it.' We waste so much time discussing so many things but hesitate to tell people we care for that, we love them. The youth is going to identify with both, Hrithik and Shah Rukh's character.

Which of the two heroes do you identify with?
I'd say there is a little of me in both the characters but more significant, I identify with the subject. Contrary to the impression generated, non-communication isn't just a certain class or community problem. 99 per cent out of the 100 so

called urban, affluent nuclear families don't ever express affection through words. I know I don't, though I'm changing now. My film has emphasised its importance to me.

Lagaan *and* Dil Chahta Hai *have proved to be the trendsetters of the year. What should one expect from your film?*

The preconceived notions and the high expectations from the trade are weighing me down. Everywhere I go people tell me that after the huge losses the industry has suffered this year, my film is the only hope. It's too much of a responsibility. In my opinion rather than get into comparisons, we should be celebrating that Indian cinema has finally reached a point where different genres can co-exist. Today, cinema is like a well-laid banquet where the audience can pick its choice.

What are you planning next?

I haven't decided. Maybe a tragedy, a thriller or something entirely different. I haven't thought about it. I need to first get this film out of my system, then take a long deserved break. Unwind. After that I'll see.

Have you ever considered making a woman-oriented film?

Why not? The two heroines played an important role in my first film and they do so in my second film as well. I feel I understand women better than men. It's because they share confidences with me and use me as a sounding board, as a result I'm often taken for granted by them.

Do you also take people for granted?

I hope not for that would be thoughtless, unless it happens unintentionally. I'm not talking about parents and loved ones because everyone takes them for granted, but otherwise I'm consciously watching myself and those around me. For this is the only way one can learn and grow.

So what have you learnt from your illustrious star-cast?

Let's see, from Amit uncle I've learnt discipline and drive. The humility with which he listens to a fresher like me is moving. From Jaya aunty I learnt the complete ability to be at ease once the camera is switched off. Kajol has that quality too and that is the reason both the women were the life of the sets. What can I say about Shah Rukh Khan? I

have no doubts that he is the finest person I have met in my life. He has humanitarian qualities and the more time I spend with him, the more I learn. His energy is infectious.

You've left out Hrithik and Kareena.

Hrithik is obsessed with his work. We all are, but while all of us give 100 per cent he gives 300 per cent. From Kareena I have to admit I have not learnt anything. In fact, I have been the teacher. It's interesting for me to observe that today, Kareena is at the same stage where Kajol was during *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, completely spontaneous and therefore magical.

The trade predicts that your film will be the biggest blockbuster in recent years. Also the most over-budget film to be ever released.

I cannot comment on the first until the film is released. The latter is true. It's because I am a mad man when it comes to my frame. I am not willing to make the slightest compromise in quality and I have an equally obsessed father who is willing to indulge me to any extent. In fact he is the wings I take on and fly.

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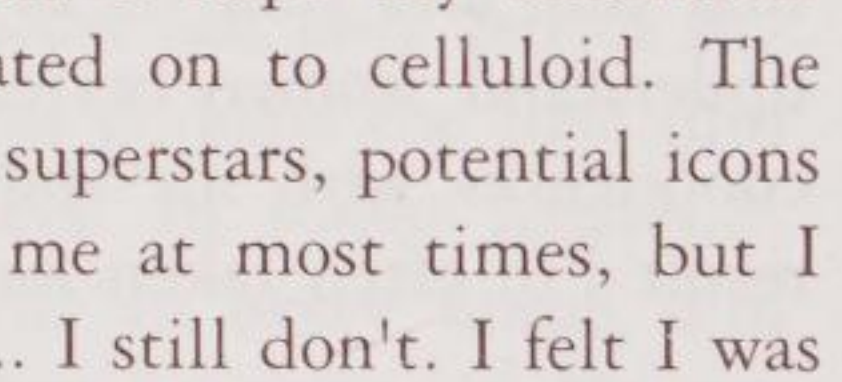
'I don't know if I have lived up to expectations but I do know that all of me is in the film. I hope my emotional energy has been effectively translated on to celluloid. The crowd of cinema legends, reigning superstars, potential icons and brilliant technicians engulfed me at most times, but I still felt alone. I don't know why ... I still don't. I felt I was waging a war with just one missile - my screenplay. Either it hit the target or missed it ... It was the fear of the latter that kept me up at nights throughout the making of the film.'



(Karan Johar)

Credit's

(In alphabetical order)

- Afternoon
- g magazine
- Janmabhoomi Pravasi
- Movie
- Newstime
- Screen Weekly
- The Hindu
- The Hindusthan Times
- The Pioneer
- The Sunday Observer

BHAWANA SOMAAYA began her career in journalism in the late '70s, while studying for a B.A. degree in Psychology. Commencing with Free Press Journal as chief reporter, she moved to Super as a special correspondent, while completing LLB at the Government Law College. In '81 she joined Movie as an assistant editor and was promoted in '85 to joint editor. In '89 Chitralekha asked her to launch their first English publication g. She is the recipient of 1990s Mahila Shiromani Award. She has contributed columns to Sunday Observer, Afternoon, Janmabhoomi Pravasi, Hindustan Times, The Hindu, The Pioneer and Newstime. She has written two books. Amitabh Bachchan - The Legend, published by Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi. Salaam Bollywood by Spantech & Lancers, London. She is currently the editor of *Screen*, the film weekly of the Indian Express Group.

The book compiles articles contributed to *Super, Movie, The Sunday Observer, The Afternoon, The Hindustan Times, The Pioneer, The Hindu, g* and *Screen*, all significant pointers of a bygone era. The jargon and the mode of communication are indicative of the existing trends of that period. It's because interviews like relationships, call for a chemistry. An interview reflects as much about the interviewer as the interviewee. It tells about the influences working on the journalist at that time and also of the box-office status of the stars when they made those statements. Still, the final responsibility of the spoken word lies with the star.

The quotable quotes, even if temporarily forgotten, have a way of bouncing back into print, and always, when the star is at a vulnerable phase. Sharmila Tagore once said that she'd rather refrain, than regret her statement later. 'If I'm going to be accountable for everything I say, I'd prefer not to be embarrassed.'

Words have a culture of their own, analysed writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar. Rekha confessed that she did not anymore identify with her past impulsive statements. 'I cringe every time I read an old quote and want to deny it, but can't.'

From personality to cinema, the focus gradually shifts to the craft of acting. The early decade of the author's work relies on observations. The latter, on conversations with film folks.

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